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SCIENCE FICTION VIDEOS

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MORTAL KOMBAT
THE MOVIE
JUDGE DREDD

Stuart Gordon's
SHADOW OVER
INNSMOUTH, the
one that got away.

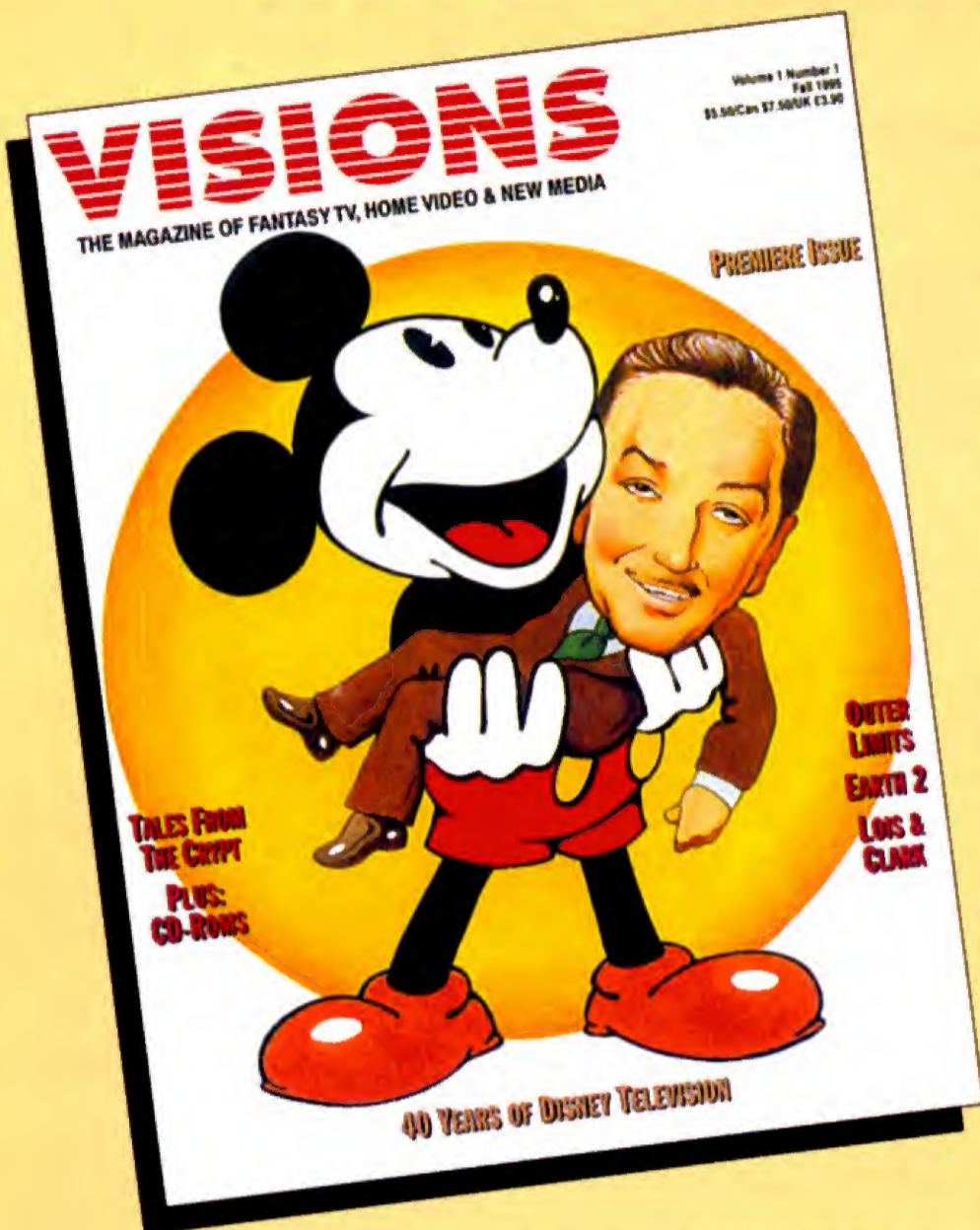
STEVEN SPIELBERG
'TOONS "CASPER"

Volume 26 Number 4



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Volume 16 No 4/5



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COMING NEXT IN IMAGI-MOVIES!

Tired of the same old King? Do you think STAR TREK's drek? Looking for a magazine that brings you in-depth analysis and criticism of the best in science-fiction, fantasy, and horror cinema? Well then, *Imagi-Movies* is just what you're looking for. Over the course of recent issues we have taken our readers back in time to "When Harryhausen Ruled the Earth," to unearth the secrets of Dynamation Dinosaurs, and "Beyond Dracula—into the Realm of the Post-Modern Vampire" to reveal how Anne Rice's INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE overturned cobwebby cliches and revitalized the genre. These and other cover stories, ranging from WOLF to H.R. Giger to WES CRAVEN'S NEW NIGHTMARE, examined their subjects in a way that the competition just can't match, exploring their context and appeal, the background and history that makes the material so fascinating in the first place.

Don't miss our exhaustive on-the-set report of the making of BATMAN FOREVER, starring Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones and Jim Carrey. Find out how dark the new Dark Knight will be now that Joel Schumacher has taken over the director's reins from Tim Burton, who abandoned the series in favor of making a CATWOMAN movie instead. Plus, an extensive look back at BATMAN RETURNS, the quirky 1992 sequel that surpassed the stolid original.

Also next issue, CRYING FREEMAN and FIST OF THE NORTH STAR; behind-the-scenes of the live-action films based on Japanese anime; "Sequel Mania:" an examination of Hollywood's obsession with roman numerals; retrospectives on the history of Mexican Fantasy Cinema and the career of '50s sci-fi stalwart Beverly Garland; and our usual exhaustive review section on cinema, laser and video.

While striving to remain on the cutting edge of what's new in the genre, we also provide the kind of "Classic Coverage" that serious devotees of the genre have been demanding: reviews of all films in current release; profiles of actors, writers and directors with a proven talent for producing quality work; and retrospectives of the classics that sparked our initial interest in imaginative cinema. Subscribe to the next four quarterly issues of *Imagi-Movies* for just \$18, a savings of \$4 off the newsstand price of \$5.50 and select your rare back issue of *Cinefantastique* from among those pictured and described above and on page 63 (offer good to new subscribers only). Also subscribe to *Visions* and take two free issues!!



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The magazine with a "Sense of Wonder."

JUNE 1995

Are you a video snob? I am, or I should say I used to be, but old habits die hard. Time was, if I didn't see a film during its original theatrical run, I rarely ever caught up with it on video. Why? Because I like the movie theatre experience with better picture, better sound and no interruptions. I mention this by way of explanation to confess that up to doing this issue's cover story on Full Moon, I've never watched a Full Moon video. I've since corrected that gap in my viewing habits, and can heartily recommend to you both SHRUNKEN HEADS and Moonbeam's DRAGONWORLD, if you, like me, are more inclined to go out than curl up with a rental.

That's not to say that I wasn't well-acquainted with the work of Full Moon producer Charles Band, whose amazing output as a filmmaker dedicated to working in the horror, fantasy and science fiction genres, is the subject of this issue's cover story. I'd managed to catch a number of Band's efforts in theatres. And maybe that's why I steered clear of Full Moon. I don't think I'll ever quite forget watching Band's END OF THE WORLD in a theatre in 1976. It's not a film that was enhanced by its theatrical setting. In fact, it's astounding to think that before video, people actually went out to see movies that bad. But the quality of Band's product has improved steadily to the point where his Full Moon operation is turning out some terrific pictures on some amazingly low budgets. But they're not all terrific, which is where our filmography of Band this issue, written by John Thonen, comes in handy. If you, like me, are interested in catching up on what you may have missed, Thonen's mini-reviews will help you avoid the video potholes along the way.

And since you might be curious about why I would commission a cover story on a subject I hadn't deigned to watch, I guess I'd better explain that too. If you happen to rent SHRUNKEN HEADS, I and my wife Celeste can be spotted among the bus passengers—all video store owners—that Full Moon sent careening off a bridge during filming in September of 1993. I was so impressed by Band's mini-studio operation at the time, that this cover story is the result. And now, you'll excuse me, but I have a lot of videos to catch up on.

Frederick S. Clarke



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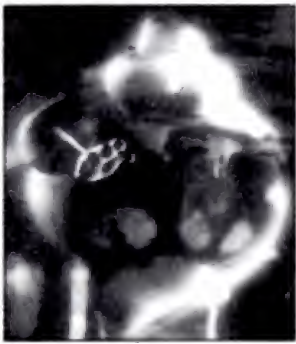
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BATMAN FOREVER

Director Joel Schumacher starts over with a clean slate.

By Steve Biodrowski

The Dark Knight returns, but neither Michael Keaton, nor Tim Burton, in *BATMAN FOREVER*, the third entry of Warner Brothers most successful franchise ever. Instead Joel Schumacher (*LOST BOYS*) directs Val Kilmer (*THE DOORS*) as Gotham's most eligible bachelor. Opposing the caped crusader is Jim Carrey, as crazed inventor Edward Nygma, whose transformation into the Riddler gets the origin treatment this time out. He is joined by Tommy Lee Jones (best supporting actor in *THE FUGITIVE*) as former District Attorney Harvey Dent, now known as the villainous Two-Face since acid disfigured his features and drove him mad. (Apparently, the acid also changed his skin color; Dent was played by Billy Dee Williams in the first *BATMAN*.)

Dick Grayson, in the person of Chris O'Donnell (*SCENT OF A WOMAN*), finally makes an appearance and becomes Robin the Boy Wonder. Other newcomers include Nicole Kidman as criminal psychologist



Oscar-winner Tommy Lee Jones as former District Attorney Harvey Dent, aka Two-Face, a character played by Billy Dee Williams in the 1989 original.

Dr. Chase Meridian, Drew Barrymore, Debi Mazar, and Ed Begley, Jr. The only returning faces are Michael Gough as Alfred and Pat Hingle as Commissioner Gordon. The script is by Lee Batchler, Janet Scott Batchler and Akiva Goldsman. Warner Bros opens the film nationwide June 16.

The production has been getting an incredible amount of attention in the Hollywood

trade papers for well over a year, but as is often the case the quality of the production is secondary to the behind the scenes dramas, which focus mostly around the revolving door of talent involved.

First, Tim Burton bowed out of directing the second sequel, instead planning to launch a tangential *CATWOMAN* franchise, after Michelle Pfeiffer's agile Catwoman stole the show from Keaton's stolid Batman in *BATMAN RETURNS*. Shortly thereafter, Keaton, perhaps feeling left behind, opted not to reprise the lead role. Then, Rene Russo, originally slated to be the new love interest, was replaced when Val Kilmer signed on; Schumacher

went after Sandra Bullock, hot off the success of *DEMOLITION MAN* and *SPEED* but settled for Nicole Kidman. Finally, when Robin Williams took too long considering the role of the Riddler, the part was offered to Carrey. Williams' agents were reportedly furious, because the part had not actually been turned down before the new offer was made.

So, those are the behind-the-



A new Batman and Batmobile.

scenes travails. What about the actual movie? Will Kilmer be able to satisfy fans of the comic book in a way that Keaton never could? Or will Warner Brothers use the diminished returns of the more eccentric and Burtonesque *BATMAN RETURNS* as an excuse to avoid personal style in favor of returning to a more homogenized corporate product, *a la* the first film?

First off, casting Kilmer has not brought the public outcry which greeted Keaton, a fact which the p.r. department view as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it's nice that people aren't angry at the movie; on the other, they're not talking about it as much as the first one.

According to unit publicist Mike Singer, who wrote the "making of" books for the first two films, when Batman-creator Bob Kane heard of the new leading man, "he said he couldn't have hoped for anybody so perfect in the role. He said he's very handsome and has great charm, so you can really understand how this guy is Gotham's number one bachelor. Then as Batman he felt he has the right depth. He really fell in love with Val and the sets and everything else. Bob has been very supportive of this movie."

Of being selected by Burton



Val Kilmer replaces Michael Keaton as the Dark Knight, and gets new Batdigs.

himself, who is producing the film, Schumacher said, "Tim's been real supportive of me, but he's been real busy. He did ED WOOD while we were preparing this, and he's been in New York a lot of the time. Actually, when Warners asked me if I wanted to do it, I said 'I'll do it if Tim wants me to do it,' because we've been really good friends since LOST BOYS. So I went to see him, and he said, 'Yes, please do it.'"

As with BATMAN RETURNS, the new film will start from the ground up in terms of design and art direction, giving Schumacher some room to put his imprint on the material. "I don't think imitation is a form of flattery," said the new director. "I think imitation is an insult, and I also think that, if you imitate anything, it's always worse than the thing you're imitating. So what we needed to do, especially with Val playing Bruce Wayne and Batman, [was] change it considerably. Also, I wanted to have fun making it, and I wanted to make the movie fun. Because it's a summer movie—we all know that—it should be fun, like a comic book."

Schumacher also noted that Bob Kane is pleased with the new direction of the series—with a couple exceptions: "He

loves what we're doing, and he's very supportive," said the director, adding with a laugh, "There's only two things he doesn't like: that I put an earring on Dick Grayson and that I put nipples on Batman's suit. He said, 'Joel, I just don't understand why there have to be nipples on the suit.'"

Still, Schumacher can't completely avoid the influence of the earlier films. They "affected me first of all because I wouldn't have the job if Tim didn't do such a brilliant job before me," he admitted. "Number 2: Michael Gough is still playing Alfred, and Pat Hingle is still playing Commissioner Gordon. So there's a lot of relationships in this movie, but you have to start fresh if you're the new director, because you really can't figure out what another director did right or wrong; you just have to follow your own instincts—that's what you're hired for. You have to take risks if you take something on that's already known."

Those risks have not been nearly so insurmountable as the director feared. "I actually thought this was going to be a lot more difficult than it's been," he sighed with relief, nearing the conclusion of 100 days of principal photography.

REINVENTING THE BATWHEEL

"I think imitation is an insult," said Schumacher. "If you imitate anything, it's always worse than what you're imitating. We needed to change it considerably."

"I thought it was going to be a very arduous task, like climbing Mount Everest. I thought, 'What have I gotten myself into? Why am I doing this? I'm crazy!'"

"When they asked me to do it, I thought it would be so much fun—and it was—but somewhere between thinking it would be fun and having it be fun, the fear of the unknown set in. I'd never had this long a schedule; I'd never done this many special effects. Although LOST BOYS and FLATLINERS had special effects in them, most of them were in-camera; we had very little budget and very little time. I think the movies look good, but they look good by spit and polish. We had big things to do here."

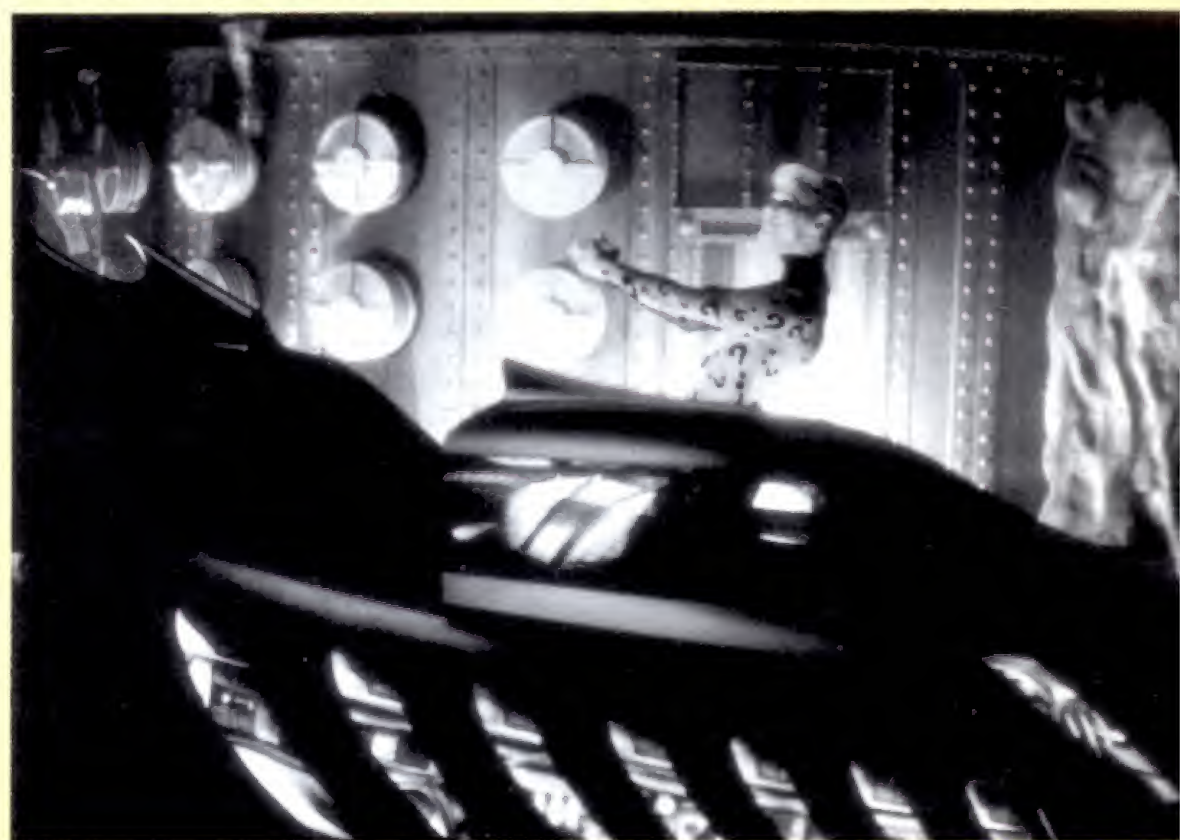
Of course, Burton's expressionistic approach to the material was not to everyone's taste, particularly parents with young children who found the PG-13 BATMAN RETURNS, with its bile-spewing Penguin, too disturbing. "I hope you'll think it's like a living comic book," said Schumacher of his approach to the film. "We went back to the original: The Riddler starts off

as Edward Nigma, and Dick Grayson's family dies in the circus. The Harvey/Two-Face legend is very intact from the comic book: Boss Marroni throws acid in his face." (This last element is downplayed somewhat, reduced to flashbacks, in order to focus on the origin of the Riddler. Harvey Dent is already escaped from Arkham Asylum when the movie begins, and his transformation into Two-Face is recalled only via videotaped newsclips.)

Some soothsayers are already predicting that the overabundance of lead characters will lead to a jumbled structure, an accusation leveled at the second film as well, which also had to divide time between its hero and two villains. When queried on this point, Schumacher seemed a bit perturbed. "Is that a yes or no question?" he laughed. "I mean, do you want me to answer, 'No, it will fail; it can't work'? I've done a lot of movies where we've got many people's stories going on at the same time: ST. ELMO'S FIRE, LOST BOYS, FLATLINERS. I haven't made a lot of one-per-

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Jim Carrey as the Riddler, pleased to have gained entrance to Batman's inner sanctum, a role offered to Robin Williams, who was too slow in signing on.



JUDGE DREDD

Disney gives Britain's comic book hero a big budget movie treatment.

By Alan Jones

Great Britain's favorite comic book anti-hero finally hits the screens this summer, June 30, nearly two decades after becoming the most popular strip in *IPC* magazine's "2,000 AD" weekly. Twenty-six-year-old Danny Cannon directs *JUDGE DREDD* with megastar Sylvester Stallone in the title role as the cop of the future—judge, jury and executioner rolled into one crime-busting figure—patrolling the 23rd-century streets of Mega-City One, an amalgamation of every American city on the eastern seaboard. Filmed entirely in England at Shepperton Studios, where the imposing Mega-City One set (four times the size of *BATMAN*'s Gotham City) was built on the backlot, *JUDGE DREDD* is a Cinergi Pictures Entertainment Inc./Edward R. Pressman production, in association with Charles M. Lippincott. The latter bought the rights to the Fleetway Editions Ltd.-owned character in the early '80s.

"*STAR WARS* meets *BEN HUR*" is how Cannon likes to describe the \$69 million production, sporting special effects by Joss (*ALIEN 3*) Williams and visual effects by Joel (*PREDATOR*) Hynek. "Movies like *SPARTACUS*, *BEN HUR* and *EL CID* had an earnest conviction about them," said Cannon. "No matter how gaudy, brash and camp they were, they



Stallone takes direction from 26-year-old Danny Cannon, new blood for the genre. Cannon's 1993 directing debut was the thriller *YOUNG AMERICANS*.

took themselves very seriously indeed. You didn't laugh at Charlton Heston because he exuded a stern emotional honesty. That sort of *LAST EMPEROR* atmosphere is what I've been at pains to recreate in *JUDGE DREDD*. It had to be as luscious looking and on that grand a scale with no compromises. I wanted vast polished floors, shiny granite buildings, huge fireplaces, red flowing robes and sincere salutes to make the epic point. It's as much a passion play as a science fiction fantasy and, along with being dazzled, I want audiences to be tearing their hearts out over Dredd's predicament."

That predicament has taken numerous writers over 12 years to sort out with scripters Steven De Souza, Walon Green, William Wisher, John Fasano, Gary

Goldman and Cannon himself being credited for the current story which has Dredd framed by his evil clone 'brother' Rico (*THE MAMBO KINGS*' Armand Assante) for murder. Sent to the Aspen Penal Colony situated in the Cursed Earth, a perilous toxic wasteland left over from an earlier atomic age, Dredd hooks up with wisecracking Fergie (*SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE* star Rob Schneider) to bring Rico to justice before he can populate the planet with armies of Judges cloned from his defective DNA. *STREETS OF FIRE*'s Diane Lane is Judge Hershey, another Dredd ally, while *DUNE*'s Jürgen Prochnow plays the corrupt Supreme Justice helping Rico implement his psychotic plan. Max Von Sydow, Joan Chen, Joanna Miles, James Remar and

Balthazar Getty round out the stellar cast.

Many were surprised when Cannon landed the plum assignment of directing *JUDGE DREDD* because his debut with *THE YOUNG AMERICANS*, a London-based thriller starring Harvey Keitel made for \$3 million in 1993, was a major commercial disappointment and didn't even open theatrically in America. But it was Cannon's visual style which impressed the producers more than anything else, coupled with his ability to achieve great results on a limited budget. "What was clear from *THE YOUNG AMERICANS* was that Danny

was a sure filmmaker and emotionally mature about what he portrayed," said producer Beau Marks. "There was a great deal of discussion between myself, [executive producer] Andy Vajna and Stallone over using Danny. The nature and scope of *DREDD* meant we couldn't just throw anybody into the process who didn't have an immense amount of experience. But we didn't want to get a director merely because he had a reputation for doing movies of this size. What finally won us over to Danny's side was his passion about the Judge Dredd character. He'd grown up with the comic strip, knew everything about the Dredd universe and had incredible energy. That's what sold him to Sly."

Cannon swears he didn't think he had any chance at all of



Stallone as Dredd, 23rd-century judge, jury and executioner all rolled into one.

directing JUDGE DREDD when Vajna first contacted him for an entirely different reason altogether. "Andy offered me DIE HARD 3, not WITH A VENGEANCE, the one they've just made, but a different script altogether," said Cannon. "I wasn't keen but suddenly remembered he owned the JUDGE DREDD property and during the meeting asked if I could tell him my ideas about it. I told him everything about why the comic was important to me growing up, what inspired me and how I envisioned the final movie. I honestly wasn't angling for the directing job, I just wanted to get my collected thoughts on the project off my chest after harboring them for so long. It turned out this was exactly what Andy wanted to hear. He needed someone with a strong vision to take charge or else it was going to become just

another futuristic cop thriller like ROBOCOP. He knew how important DREDD's integrity would be to me."

Although Arnold Schwarzenegger was attached to the project, for a while—Beau Marks smiled, "Actually, he never said yes and he never said no"—it was Sylvester Stallone's involvement which put JUDGE DREDD on the front burner, thanks to his global boxoffice appeal. "I wouldn't have been interested in directing Arnie and, in truth, I wasn't even convinced about Sly until I met him for the first time," said Cannon. "He was knee deep in the comics and was working out exactly who Dredd was, why he did what he did. His growing love for the character swayed me and now I can't imagine anyone else playing him. Sly listened to what I had to say about Dredd and why we had to open

"It's STAR WARS meets BEN-HUR," said director Danny Cannon. "No matter how gaudy, brash and camp they were, they took themselves seriously."

up the story. We both ended up agreeing on a shared vision and Sly would have done the whole movie in his helmet if need be."

From the fan standpoint, the fact that Dredd's face is finally going public has caused much controversy. Dredd's features should forever remain a secret, according to them. But the purists must accept the Stallone audience, argued Cannon. "The fans have got to grow up," he said. "The guy's gotta take his helmet off so we can see the human being underneath. Or do we show him having a shower wearing it? No, we have to crack the armor and give him an identity. It's not just the comic fans we're catering to, either. There's the Stallone crowd who want to see his face. You either needed a complete unknown like Christopher Reeve in SUPERMAN or you needed a movie legend when you crane up from an impressive badge to see who exactly this imposing Judge is. Dredd was an icon in Mega-City One in the same way that Stallone is a contemporary megastar. Sly hasn't been afraid to show his vulnerable side either in the necessity to split the character wide open."

As far as Stallone was concerned, JUDGE DREDD offered him the chance to redefine the anti-hero for the '90s. "Dredd isn't just some guy who walks around with a machine gun blowing villains away," said Stallone. "He's a life-preserver who'll readily die for his principles or any infringement of the law. He has no personal life. He's not allowed to have a girlfriend and he wants no money. His life is the law and his stoicism was refreshing for me to play."

Stallone believe the whole JUDGE DREDD concept isn't too far off becoming a reality either. "Look at what's happening in American inner-cities," he said. "If our hopeless legal

system continues going in the same liberal direction, there will be anarchy before long. We need one person in an influential position to stand up and tell the truth about gun control lobbies, the death penalty and that our criminal justice system basically stinks. We must start from scratch with a whole new rethink, or policemen with the powers of Dredd will be a part of our conceivable future."

To most Americans JUDGE DREDD is an unknown quantity. Beau Marks doesn't see this anonymity as a problem. "JUDGE DREDD is going into the American market place as something new and different," he said. "It helped BATMAN to be a familiar icon everyone knew and that's why someone like Michael Keaton could play the leading role and get away with it. Our ace card is Stallone, as there is a core audience who will go and see everything he does. The other core group is the science fiction crowd who like their regular special effects fix." □

Though available as U.S. reprints, the comics are hardly a household name, a situation about to change.



MORTAL KOMBAT

The bloody arcade hit gets a mythic fleshing out on screen.

By Douglas Eby

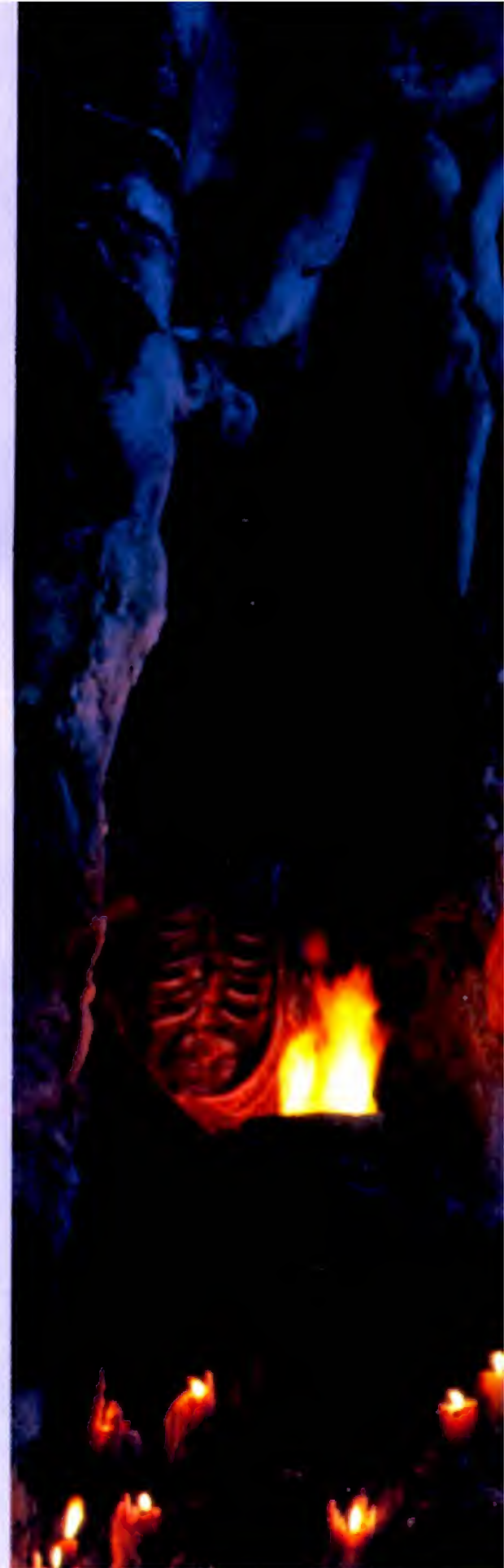
MORTAL KOMBAT as a game has grossed more money than JURASSIC PARK, with arcade versions now in almost every entertainment center in the world, and home sales in excess of five million copies, or \$200 million. Sales of version II of the home game were higher than \$50 million in its first week of sales, ranking as the largest introduction of a video game in history. New Line Cinema is hoping to build on all that success with their new feature, opening in May.

Director Paul Anderson (SHOPPING) emphasizes what he thinks will make it appealing to a wide audience: "The performances are really good," said Anderson. "If you have big enough sets and enough special effects, you can always make it really exciting, but a lot of action films just don't have great performances. The nice thing about cutting the end of the movie at the moment is that, yes, it's got a lot of special effects, but also it's really touching. Films like STAR WARS and RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, which we refer to all the

time, had more than effects. They had characters you could identify with, sympathize with. What I like about RAIDERS, and relate to the performances in MORTAL KOMBAT, is that Harrison Ford gives a great performance. It's like the man's doing Hamlet."

From his studio in London's SoHo district, Anderson often ventured to local video arcades to play the game. "Mortal Kombat reminded me of movies I loved as a kid, like epic quest movies made by Ray Harryhausen," said Anderson. "And I thought nobody has made a

Left: Sonya Blade (Bridgette Wilson), at the mercy of Outworld. Right: Robin Shou as Liu Kang (l) fights evil sorcerer Shang Tsung (Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa), who leads the supernatural forces against Earth.



Kano (Trevor Goddard), bitter enemy of kombatant Sonya Blade.





EMOTIONAL KICKS

“The performances are really good,” said director Paul Anderson. “A lot of action films just don’t have that. It’s got a lot of effects, but it’s also really touching.”

movie like those for such a long time. The strength of these films, I feel—and the reason you can still watch them now, and they’re still classics—is that, although the special effects look like shit, they still have great stories and great characters, often based on Greek myth. I saw making the film as an opportunity to make a new epic quest movie, where the audience can be taken on a journey with the characters. So you get an action movie with a heart and soul: JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS meets John Woo.”

This is the first project for producer Larry Kasanoff’s new company Threshold Productions. Formerly with James Cameron’s Lightstorm company, where he supervised production of TERMINATOR 2, and executive produced TRUE LIES, Kasanoff notes the film is not simply another version of the game, without the interactive play element. “[There’s] a great story behind MORTAL KOMBAT,” said Kasanoff. “I don’t consider we’re making a movie of the video, we’re making a movie of the story on which the game is based. That story is rich in characters,

myths, legends, heroes and villains. It’s a great story. And I learned there’s a lot about it the computer game player doesn’t know. If you’re a fan, what you’ve got here is something extra. We can tell you a lot you don’t know.”

The game’s violence is notorious. “The film,” Kasanoff countered, “will show you cooler stuff, like what Scorpion looks like when you get really close; you can’t see that in the video game. I think it’s more exciting. If I were to show you the game’s violence in a movie, it would look like FRIDAY THE 13TH. You’ve seen it a hundred times.

“We literally have the best martial artists ever gathered for one movie in the history of movies. We’re going to see some awesome, amazing fights. We’ve got a story about a bunch of people who have to face their own fears, believe in themselves, and in doing that they can literally accomplish anything, and so can you. That’s what our movie is about. It’s a great story about believing in yourself.”

Visual effects are supervised by Alison Savitch, who worked on TERMINATOR 2. Savitch

The forbidding realm of Outworld, where Earth’s finest mortal combatants are pitted against evil superhuman forces which threaten to take over our world.



Below: Linden Ashby as Johnny Cage, the martial arts movie star forced to face off in combat for real. Right: A sentinel of the Outworld combat circle.



MORTAL KOMBAT

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The animated prequel opens on video in April.

By Anthony P. Montesano

In a daring, never-before-attempted marketing move, on April 11, New Line Home Video will release **MORTAL KOMBAT: THE JOURNEY BEGINS**, a full-length animated version of Midway's *Mortal Kombat*, before New Line Cinema releases the live-action theatrical version of **MORTAL KOMBAT** for the big screen in May. Plot-wise, the video literally serves as an antecedent to the theatrical release.

MORTAL KOMBAT producers Larry Katanoff and effects supervisor Alison Savitch teamed up with the special effects/animation wizards at MotionWorks in Hollywood to produce the animated video.

"They were clear that the production needed to have an ambitious new look," said MotionWorks president Rick Mel-

choir, who serves as animation producer. "It couldn't look like Saturday morning TV." All the characters familiar to fans of the game *Mortal Kombat* appear in **MORTAL KOMBAT: THE JOURNEY BEGINS**, including Sonya Blade, Johnny Cage, Rayden, Liu Kang, Scorpion, Sub Zero, the monster Goro and the supreme Mortal Kombat master, Shang Tsung. The video sets the stage for the battle to come, fought on the Realm of Outworld, between the forces of good and evil. Hanging in the balance is the very fate of the Earth itself.

Kevin Droney, the theatrical version's writer, also wrote **THE JOURNEY BEGINS**. While the characters in the home video are based on those from the game, the video focuses on the myths and story behind *Mortal Kombat*, not the violence, and serves as a "bridge" from the game to the live-action film, which will pick up exactly



Kang and Johnny Cage under a spell, cel and computer animation by MotionWorks in a direct-to-video cartoon feature that sets up the live-action feature.

where the video leaves off "cliffhanger style."

With credits ranging from the digital F/X for **BRAINSCAN** and digital ink and paint for the animated features such as **FERNGULLY** and **THE PAGEMASTER**, MotionWorks seemed the logical company to turn to for this ambitious venture. **MORTAL KOMBAT: THE JOURNEY BEGINS** is the first program to blend computer-generated 3-D animated backgrounds with traditional 2-D cel-animated characters for extended screen time. The project required extensive R&D, which included tests of 2-D cel animation combined with 3-D computer environments. It was the success of these tests that persuaded Katanoff to award the project to MotionWorks, according to Melchior.

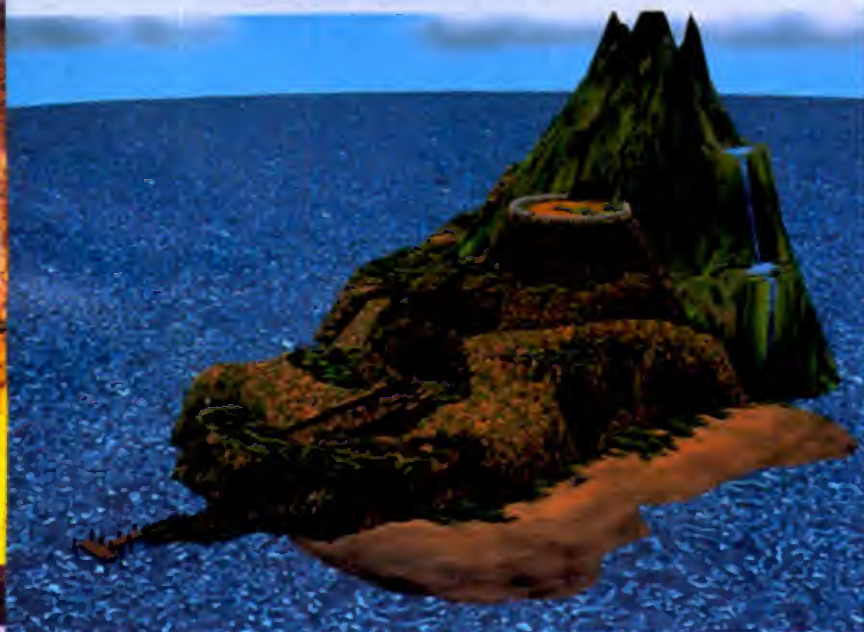
"Walt Disney used a similar technique for the ballroom scene in **BEAUTY AND THE**

BEAST and certain scenes in **ALADDIN** and **THE LION KING**, but we're the first to use the technique for an entire program," said Melchior. Within the elaborate 3-D backgrounds, environmental effects such as rolling fog banks, rippling water and lightning storms displayed the full power of MotionWorks' approach.

MotionWorks supervised the entire production, from storyboard concepts to final edit. A team of animators at MotionWorks carefully composited the two forms of animation to create the action. Although able to produce photo-realistic backgrounds in the computers, MotionWorks had to intentionally tone down the look of the environments to prevent an unnatural contrast with the more cartoon-like cel-animated characters.

In many ways, the production process resembled a live-action film, according to Melchior. "We built the sets in the computers and then used the 'cameras' in the computers to shoot the cel-animated characters within that environment and the lighting." The director could thus treat the cel-animated characters "like actors" and have greater control over their movements within the environments. The sets include a fully realized, computer-animated ship, and a remote island complete with a temple, cave and garden path. "The camera moves are complex," said Melchior. "Everything you'd expect to see in a live-action version." □

Mortal Kombat Island (l) and the entrance to the Mortal Kombat arena, computer animation by MotionWorks. The cartoon prequel represents the most extensive combination yet of computer and traditional cel animation techniques.



hired RG/LA (THE SHADOW) and Buena Vista to do the film's computer graphics and digital material. Anderson praises the effects team. "Half of the fights are straight balls-out violent fights, and the other 50% actually involve special effects for characters with special powers," he said. "I'm thoroughly enjoying working with effects, which can make scenes even more exciting."

Savitch also credits her mechanical effects group. One of the "stars" is an animatronic—"Goro," created by Tom Woodruff and Alec Gillis of ADI, Amalgamated Dynamics. Savitch dubbed it as "one of the most amazing effects we're doing. I wouldn't even call him a creature—he's a believable character. He's not this lumbering ox, he's a smooth, powerful, charming, exciting, frightening being that brings the movie to life." She noted with a laugh, "The actors are good too, but he's amazing."

Playing the evil sorcerer Shang Tsung is Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa (RISING SUN, THE LAST EMPEROR, TWINS). "This is one of the highlights of my career," he enthused. "I do play a lot of bad guys and it gets to be repetitious after a while. To play a demon sorcerer, to play evil at its worst and have magic—that is magic. I knew about this story from my son playing the game. What I found interesting even before I came to the project was how many kids like the bad guys in Mortal Kombat. They like Sub Zero and Scorpion, and especially Shang Tsung, having the ability to morph and change into different people; he's one of the favorites."

The use of effects doesn't mean the acting challenge is less, as Tagawa noted. "Morphing is not an easy process. They said, 'You'll be changing at this point.' Well, good, they have the technology to do that, but you have to do a lot of work. It really makes me appreciate what Patrick had to do in T2. For example, movement—you have to match someone else's, and turn into that. As an actor, you like to give a performance and figure that's it, or if there's a problem, you go back and loop it. That's not always easy, but this is looping on another

HEROIC FANTASY

"The arcade game reminded me of movies I loved as a kid," said Anderson, "like the epic quest movies of Ray Harryhausen. Nobody has done those for a long time."



Bridgette Wilson as U.S. Special Forces Lt. Sonya Blade, the team leader.

level—it has to match another person. It's quite a challenge."

Savitch noted that MORTAL KOMBAT is getting far more for its morphing dollars than she bought in T2. "Years ago, when I worked on T2, people charged huge numbers for a morph—you could pay \$80,000 or \$100,000 dollars, because almost nobody knew how to do it," said Savitch. "They had to write their own proprietary software, and get the different software companies working on certain things to make it work. Now there's an \$89 morph program that 14-year-old kids are using on their home computers. Everything's changing constantly. You can't just do a morph in a movie and get away with it, you have to do something special."

Noted Tagawa, "What's been interesting for me with this role is to find the core of what evil is about. It's interesting to find the human aspect of where evil comes from. The difference between evil and good is a fine line, and any person at any given time, given the right circumstances, could be in the wrong. I've tried to find some vulnerability, or to have some feelings—we don't expect these.

We just think evil is an overpowering thing. Given that I'm dressed in black and always making mean, nasty faces, to find those moments is not easy."

Linden Ashby (WYATT EARP, EIGHT SECONDS) portrays Johnny Cage, who is a martial-arts movie star. He's worried he's a fake like everyone says, and gets lured into Mortal Kombat to improve his image, his publicity. He's a fish out of water when he gets there, but it turns out he is the real McCoy."

Ashby shared his reaction to the game and the movie adaptation. "To tell the truth, I was blown away by how violent the game was," he said. "But the movie is PG-13. There are some great martial arts sequences. When I got the part, I trained for two months every day, all day long. It was a great experience. We're the luckiest people on earth, that we get to do what we love doing and get paid for it. That's the way I come to work every day."

Bridgette Wilson (THE LAST ACTION HERO; HIGHER LEARNING) plays agent Sonya Blade, a character the actress finds really fun to play "because she's really, really strong and very tough, although

there's a side of her where at times she could probably use help. But she will be the last to admit it, and will go down fighting before getting help from anybody. And she's strong as the men she encounters. She's very together.

"My character is very focused, always wearing black, and is a U.S. Special Forces lieutenant and a team leader. She's on this journey, not quite sure where she's going and why she's doing it. All these surprises come her way. But she's pretty much the same all the way through the story, taking care of business, and time for nothing else. There's a part of her in me, and it's fun to pull it out and explore it and play with it in a character."

Director Anderson values the high level of physical performance on the part of many of the actors. "We have some of the best fighting I've ever seen in a film, and I go see action movies all the time," said Anderson. "In a lot of films the actors just can't do it, and you have a lot of cutting so fast you can't really see what's going on. I thought the end of STARGATE was a bit like that. We've got some of the most amazing martial artists, guys who can literally run 10 feet up a wall and jump over backwards. This movie will be a real adrenaline ride, real edge of the seat stuff." □

Christopher Lambert as Rayden the immortal Thunder God who aids the trio of mortal kombatants.



CONGO

Filming Michael Crichton's long-shelved epic adventure.

By Dennis Fischer

Once upon a time, the lost civilization novel was one of the major staples of fantasy. Usually set in some exotic, remote corner of the world, a group of Eurocentric explorers would find some fabled, fabulous realm and report back. Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote dozens of them.

In 1980, Michael Crichton published *Congo*, a pastiche of such novels, which combined the old lost civilization plot with Amy, a highly intelligent gorilla with advanced communicating abilities, and a group of scientists after some diamond chips for their computers. The project was optioned by executive producer Frank Yablans, but lay fallow for a long time.

Now Kennedy-Marshall Prods. and Paramount Pictures have united to create what is essentially a \$50-million H. Rider Haggard-style epic starring Dylan Walsh, Laura Linney, Ernie Hudson, Grant Heslov, Joe Don Baker, and Tim Curry. The script is by John Patrick Shanley (*FIVE CORNERS*, *JOE VERSUS THE VOLCANO*) from Crichton's novel and script. Paramount opens the film nationwide June 9th.

In it, primatologist Peter Elliott (Dylan Walsh) and Travi-



Inhabiting the ruins of Crichton's lost African civilization, super intelligent apes courtesy of Stan Winston's animatronics.

Com project supervisor Karen Ross (Laura Linney) become unlikely partners in a search for the legendary Lost City of Zinj. Peter is the guardian of Amy (makeup effects by Stan Winston), whom he wants to return to the wild, while Karen has been sent by TraviCom's CEO Travis (Joe Don Baker) to retrieve rare diamonds needed for new communications technology.

They are accompanied by "white hunter" type guide Monroe Kelly (actor Ernie Hudson), Peter's colleague

Richard (Grant Heslov), and mysterious philanthropist Homolka (Tim Curry). Surviving the dangers of the rain forest, including a hippo attack, they discover at last the city of Zinj, and in the words of the ad copy, "Here, man is the endangered species."

The film was shot in Los Angeles, Costa Rica and Uganda, with enormous sets being constructed on the former MGM lot. The film is being directed by Frank Marshall (*ARACHNOPHOBIA*, *ALIVE*), long-time Spielberg producer and second unit director, and is produced by him, his long-time partner Kathleen Kennedy, and former Disney production executive Sam Mercer. (Kennedy/Marshall is simultaneously filming and producing the Paramount/Columbia co-production of the classic children's fantasy *THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD* during the production of *CONGO*).

Makeup effects artist Stan Winston was first contacted about *CONGO* during the shooting of *JURASSIC PARK*. He knew that creating a believable Amy would be essential to the film and believes that he and his team have made a number of breakthroughs in creature-character creation technology.



The attack of the sentient gorillas.

"As far as creating a special character for film that was totally articulated facially with animatronics, this has been the most difficult assignment we've ever had," said Winston, "because the challenge was to create a mountain gorilla that the audience accepts as a real gorilla, not a person in a suit, and this particular gorilla is one of the lead actors in the movie. Therefore, she had to be able to perform as a lead actor in the film and make you believe that she was in fact real. I think we accomplished it."

"It's the most ambitious thing that we've ever done," said Winston, "and it's as successful, if not more successful, than anything we've ever done as far as replication of life and reality. We broke ground with new skin technology, we broke ground with new animatronic technology. The new facial movements of Amy, along with her performance, which we spent a great deal of time refining, is the most organic and lifelike movement I've ever seen."

Peter Elliott, who was the choreographer for *GREYSTOKE* and for *GORILLAS IN THE MIST*, was hired to choreograph Amy and the mutant gorillas of Zinj, which were designed by Winston. "We started rehearsing the actors who would be playing the part of Amy six months before we



The explorers stand ready as their laser beam defense perimeter is breached.

“The challenge was to create a mountain gorilla that the audience accepts as a gorilla,” said effects expert Stan Winston, “not as an actor-in-a-suit.”

started shooting,” said Winston, “so there would be an excellent gorilla performance within the suit.

“We developed some new articulated hand technology, combinations of different kinds of extensions that allow us to be more fluid and reach more ground as far as the ability of articulated arm extensions than I have seen. One of the big breakthroughs for us was the combining of the walk/run extension with articulated finger ability.”

In addition to Winston’s work, other makeup chores on the film were handled by Christina Smith (HOOK, CASPER) and Matthew Mungle, who crafted the after-effects of attacks by angry apes. The extensive hair chores were handled by Judy Alexander Cory using yak hair imported from Tibet.

Production designer for the project is J. Michael Riva, who has gone from ILSA, HAREM KEEPER OF THE OIL SHEIKS to GOONIES and THE ADVENTURES OF BUCKAROO BANZAI. One of his assistants is Jack Johnson, who worked on THE SHADOW and TOYS, who designed the “mural room,” which gives the explorers a clue about the history of Zinj by depicting its story on the walls.

“We spent a lot of time try-

ing to determine whether this lost civilization would have an Egyptian flavor, Myrmidic, African, or whatever, we were going to make everything up,” said Johnson. “We gradually shifted more and more toward Egyptian. What you see in [the mural room] is actually a combination of bastardized Egyptian and Myrmidic. The lower part, which looks like a language, is a variation of Myrmidic, and the upper part is more symbols used as a language, both pictograph and small images that are almost a combination of letter forms. In reality, nothing in there says anything. They’re there just for a visual feeling.

“The pictograph, as I saw it, started over the doorway where they come in from underneath the floor. Behind their heads are two beginnings of two stories. The one on the right is sort of the physical background of how they got there: you see them on boats; you see them passing over fish, hippos, crocodiles, whatever—I had to get something in there about how they got to this point in Africa somewhere. That shifts to something that looks like a slave driver, some form of diety or power since it is wearing a hat and has a whip. Then you see what I think are the gorillas going on all fours to gradually become a human symbol. The intent was that they become

somewhat humanized, but are also controlled. We eventually see them relating to the deity at the end, two figures of power.

“The other side is more a mystical background or the stories they brought with them,” Johnson continued. “I put in stars, almost as if in constellations and different Egyptian kinds of heads that refer to different dynasties. Then you see a battle scene or troops being used. I felt there had to be some relationship to agriculture, growing foods, which leads into the mines, and we see the gorillas as slaves and eventually the volcano, which ties in to the basic part of the story.”

As with many lost civilization stories, the climax of CONGO involves an exploding volcano, with effects courtesy of Industrial Light and Magic that will bring a new excitement to this old standby ploy. Additionally, physical effects are handled by Michael Lantieri, who won an Academy Award for his work on JURASSIC PARK after being nominated for HOOK and BACK TO THE FUTURE PART II.

A constant design element is an eye carved into the architecture of Zinj that imbues the party with the constant feeling that they are being watched. Explained Johnson, “When you use it in a symbol form with two people at each end, almost as if they are holding it, this could then become fire, or trapping the sun, whatever you want it to be. It was a way to use it to bring on some kind of thought, which then switches to the gorillas again and the former cells that they stayed in.

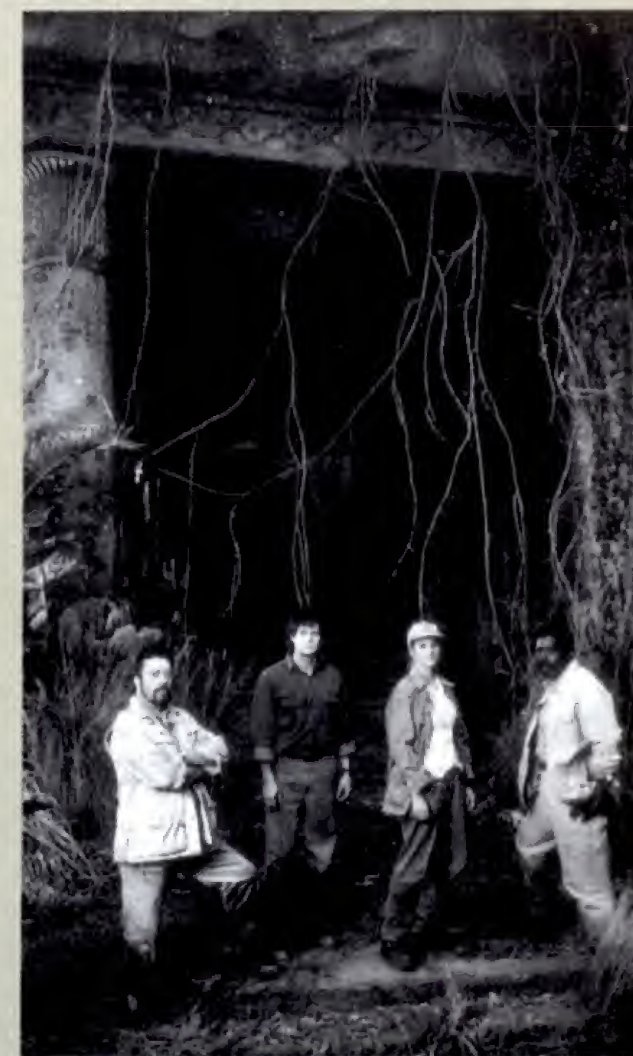
“Supposedly these gorillas, who have long survived the civilization and their masters have apparently taught their young, generation after generation, to protect these mines.” The party discovers that they are not the first to discover the

lost city, but previous discoverer’s have not survived to reveal their discovery due to the efficient policing by mutated grey apes.

J. Michael Riva has a pronounced backlit tone to his visual designs, which allow them to seem more natural without going crazy with the lighting. Lighting chores on the film were supervised by the great lighting cameraman Allen Daviau (E.T., THE COLOR PURPLE). The huge sets will be extended with effects from ILM, which will help give Zinj its magnificent scope.

Marshall has demonstrated a canny ability to orchestrate thrills in the past, and his production work has ensured that Spielberg’s films are some of the most handsomely mounted of all time. Drawing on the same talent, one can expect that CONGO will make an impressive addition to the tales of lost civilizations. □

Discovering the Lost City of Zinj (l to r), Tim Curry, Dylan Walsh, Laura Linney and Ernie Hudson.



CASPER

Amblin owns Memorial Day with another CGI blast from '50s animation past.

By Dan Persons

Even if you had somehow coaxed Jeff Goldblum into bug-ging out his eyes and stuttering, "P-p-p-p-p-pp-pleez," you couldn't get a more unusual meeting of WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT and JURASSIC PARK than Universal's CASPER, which opens nationwide May 26. Based on the Harvey cartoons and comic books of the '50s and '60s, this latest effort out of Amblin Entertainment applies the CGI technology of Steven Spielberg's 1993 dinosaur mega-hit to the surreal Toontown notions of Bob Zemeckis' similarly successful Looney Tune homage. The result, many hope, will be the kind of family-friendly, boomer nostalgia that made last year's THE FLINTSTONES one of the summer's biggest hits.

Although Spielberg is generally well-known as a Bugs Bunny kinda guy, his decision to base a big-budget fantasy/comedy on animation's lonely, little spectre did not come by whim. "This was actually a project that Steven holds very dear to his heart," explained Colin Wilson, the film's producer. "This property has a lot of heart and a lot of warmth. It deals with a relationship between two people who are very lonely and all they want is some friendship in their lives. It's very endearing from that standpoint."

Unlike the cartoon series—which was notable for little be-



Director Brad Silberling checks video playback on his feature debut. Silberling took over after CROW director Alex Proyas left due to "creative differences."

yond its cookie-cutter plotlines and its endless assortment of Tex Avery-style eye-takes (All together, now: "A...a...aaaaa...GHOOOOOOOOOSSSSSS TTTTTTT!!!!")—the feature-length CASPER (the title of which has been shorn of its "Friendly Ghost" qualifier) represents a concerted attempt to hang a little meat on long-emasculated bones. No longer an itinerant spook searching the world for someone to befriend, Casper (voiced by screen newcomer Malachi Pearson), along with his decidedly less human-affirmative uncles Stretch (Joe Nipote), Stinky (Joe Alaskey) and Fatso (Brad Garrett), have set up housekeeping in the abandoned Whipstaff Manor, where they fend off the attacks of paranormal specialists hired by spoiled heiress Carrigan

Crittenden (Cathy Moriarty).

The day-to-day grind changes, though, with the arrival of "ghost therapist" Dr. James Harvey (SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE's Bill Pullman) and his no-nonsense daughter Kat (ADDAMS FAMILY's Christina Ricci). Smitten by the first female who can look him in the eye without exhibiting a profound desire to beat a hasty retreat, Casper becomes the girl's incorporeal suitor, chasing after the somewhat mortified teenager with puppy-dog enthusiasm. Meanwhile, Dr. Harvey initiates a doomed-from-the-start attempt to encourage Stretch, Stinky and Fatso to accept their ghostly condition and, in the phrase of a Spielberg-produced film of slightly earlier vintage, "Move into the Light."

Making his feature-film de-

but is director Brad Silberling, whose previous work on such quality television efforts as BROOKLYN BRIDGE came to Spielberg's attention quite by accident. "The show that he had seen was a BROOKLYN BRIDGE episode," the director explained. "It was an unusual story: it was a Thanksgiving and it just so happened that when [BROOKLYN BRIDGE network CBS] ran ET, they ran a repeat of a BROOKLYN BRIDGE after. I guess Steven was tuning in to make sure the color on his last reel was right or something, and sure enough, he saw the show. So when I got a call on Monday, it was because of that."

"He was wonderful. I make no bones about the fact that I had started wanting to shoot when I was literally 11, because of having seen the first day of JAWS. When I sat down with him, he said, 'Do you know why I wanted to talk with you, and do you know why I was so impressed with your show?' I said, 'I honestly don't.' He looked at me and he smiled and said, 'I could see you were trying to make a movie.'"

But that meeting was not the one that directly led to CASPER. "I met him two years prior to the beginning of CASPER," Silberling said, "for reasons of a completely different project. He had a project which could not have been more different; it was actually a small comedy/drama about kids and divorce that he wanted me

MILQUETOAST GHOST?

“I think people are going to be a little surprised,” said director Brad Silberling. “You know why Casper can’t make a friend? He scares the bejeezus out of everybody.”

for the Directors Guild for the future. The way you do it is that you have to use some of traditional animation’s working tools. I have a lead animator in Los Angeles [Phil Nibbelink, who has previously done work for Spielberg’s Amblimation outfit], and I have each of the shots, and I basically run through a sequence with him, shot-for-shot, pose-for-pose, eyebrow-crunch-for-eyebrow-crunch, and direct him as to what I want to see on the screen.

“He then works on an Amiga computer system—which is like a fancy MacDraw—and he does what amounts to pencil tests. When I’m content with those—and those are then overlaid onto our live-action picture—we marry them onto videotape and ship them to ILM. Then, when I’m up there each week—we have a monstrous team up there, 150 people—I do what we call a turnover: I go through the shot that I have roughed out, and basically most of the discussions are acting discussions. I spend a lot of time with the animators saying, ‘Here’s why I’ve done this particular feature at this moment.’ We actually have acting discussions which I don’t think they’re used to having. I direct them, and then they go

off with this animatic to use as a template. It’s not something that can’t be varied from, but it’s a very strong opening tool, and if they have other thoughts or embellishments, then we discuss those.”

For all of the technical demands, though, Silberling’s greatest challenge may be to develop a coherent vision out of Sherri Stoner’s and Deanna Oliver’s tumultuous script. Hewing to the tendency of Amblin’s more commercial product to layer on story elements until the plot becomes an almost tangential concern (which, admittedly, never hurt such efforts as *ROGER RABBIT* or *THE FLINTSTONES*), *CASPER* promises to provide audiences with a daunting challenge in its multi-layered scenario. Is it a love story, with Kat and her ghostly companion bonding in spite of the paranormal obstacles? Is it mid-’90s farce, salted through with direct references to the likes of *THE EXORCIST* and *GHOSTBUSTERS*, not to mention a befuddled walk-on by Spielberg himself? Is it a treasure hunt, with Crittenden and her weak-kneed cohort (Eric Idle) chasing after an alleged fortune secreted away somewhere on the grounds of

continued on page 61



Casper (inset) leads Christina Ricci, as the daughter of a ghost researcher, on a merry chase, CGI by ILM. Silberling termed himself a Directors Guild test case on the ways to “direct” computer imaging.

to do over at a different studio. It never panned out, and I went over to *NYPD BLUE*.

“I got a sort of 911 call from him that he had another project. This one was definitely going, but it was going to go real fast. So, I had to make a deep midnight choice about jumping in—this was around Thanksgiving a year ago—for a start date of January 17th. I figured these are the shots that come, and the only reason not to take them is if you think that the project itself has a problem. If it’s just because you’re scared to death, then that’s every reason why you gotta do it.”

There was plenty in the pro-

duction of *CASPER* to be scared of. Coming in on the film after its original director, *THE CROW*’s Alex Proyas, dropped out over plotting and design conflicts, Silberling found himself confronted with not just any garden-variety fantasy film, but a ground-breaking production that melded live-action actors with computer-generated performers to an extent never before attempted. Asked the process by which some 40 minutes of cutting-edge film technology (totaling close to 400 shots, as opposed to *JURASSIC PARK*’s 56) were created, Silberling replied, “I think I’m now the guinea pig

“It’s a g-g-g-hooooost!” Cathy Moriarty as the spoiled heiress who hires ghost doctor Bill Pullman (inset). Below: Pullman and Ricci report to work at Moriarty’s cavernous Crittenden Manor.



Below: Casper’s ghostly uncles: Fatso, Stretch, and Stinky. ILM’s computer graphics flesh out the cartoon characters for live action *a la* *ROGER RABBIT* and *THE FLINTSTONES*.



CHARLES BAND

FULL MOON MOGUL

The horror, fantasy and science fiction buff who created his own video empire.

By Dennis Fischer

For Charles Band, his Full Moon Entertainment video label has been a golden goose, promoting a marketing identity which allows him successfully to produce non-theatrically released video titles that sell well and don't require large budgets or name actors. As a consequence, Band has become one of the most prolific producers of horror, fantasy and science fiction movies since the golden days of Roger Corman in the '50s and '60s.

The company motto is "200 movies by the year 2000." Band himself is the central creative force at Full Moon, generating the ideas for his films, and he is instrumental in figuring out how they are to be sold, working from feedback from video retailers across the country.

Full Moon expanded its operations in 1994 by launching two new subsidiary labels, Moonbeam, for family genre fare, and Torchlight, for erotic, adult genre material. Plans for launching a comic book line and distributing the first theatrical Full Moon feature, *SHRUNKEN HEADS*—Band's



Band's epic, *THE PRIMEVALS*, has completed principal photography for Full Moon, directed by stop-motion specialist David Allen, a project with theatrical potential.

first theatrical project since he sold his interest in Empire International—were scrapped late last year when the company encountered funding difficulty.

Band declared Full Moon's future far from insecure. "Moonbeam is doing well," said Band. "We are pursuing those franchises that have the most commercial viability, like the Moonbeam titles, *THE PUPPETMASTER* spin-off *PUPPET WARS*, and possibly *SUBSPECIES*. *SHRUNKEN HEADS* was run on a limited

theatrical basis which is consistent with our original marketing plan."

SHRUNKEN HEADS, a bizarre comedy about decapitated heads as superheroes directed by Richard Elfman, was to have been distributed theatrically by independent distributor EMC which released films such as *NEMESIS* and *LEPRECHAUN*. According to Elfman, he paid for the film's L.A. theatrical opening out of his own pocket.

Band noted that market con-

ditions called for a restructuring of the company's marketing plan last December. Band shut down the production of *RAG DOLL*, a Full Moon title. In the future, the company will re-evaluate Torchlight, its erotic label, and will shoot more Moonbeam shows and a few less Full Moon Ones.

Since the restructuring Band has released five more movies through Paramount and is delighted with their sales. *PREHYSTERIA II* shipped 65,000 units to become the most successful direct-to-video release of '95, while *PUPPETMASTER V* shipped 30,000 units and *DRAGONWORLD* shipped 60,000.

"You have to go with the flow and react very quickly to market conditions," said Band. "We're alive and well and healthy, and on our way to making those 200 movies."

Director Stuart Gordon, who is finishing *CASTLE FREAK* for Full Moon, pegged the company's problems to its unprecedented growth, and suggested that Band's ambition may have overstretched the company's resources. In addition to the company's new headquarters in



Band at work (or is it play?) as the CEO, producer, sometimes director and almost always story inspiration for the horror, fantasy and science fiction titles released direct-to-video on his Full Moon, Moonbeam (for kids) and erotic Torchlight video labels. Below: Band's 1986 attempt to launch his epic at Empire.

Glendale, which house shooting stages and in-house makeup, effects, editing and post-production facilities, "Charlie built himself a studio in Los Feliz," said Gordon. "He took old warehouses and converted them into soundstages and kept expanding that facility. He put in all sorts of editing bays and really turned it into a mini-studio like Raleigh.

"He also [formed a] studio [partnership] in Romania. Between those two facilities, he was able to do a tremendous amount of product. He did something like 20 films last year, and I don't think there's a studio in Hollywood that has that kind of output. It's amazing."

Band denied the company's

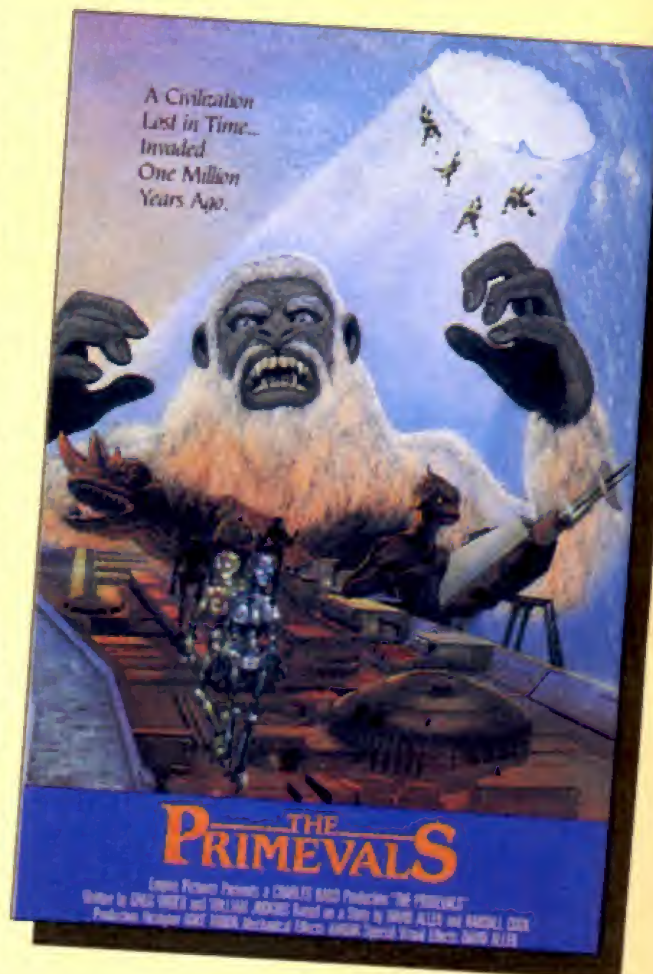
cash-flow problems had anything to do with expanding facilities. "Any change in Full Moon's financial stature is due to a decline in sales for certain Full Moon product," he said, "not to expanded operations."

Full Moon is a family-run company with Charles Band as head, his wife, Debra Dion, as production executive and shepherdess of the Moonbeam line; his father, longtime director Albert Band, is a sometime executive producer; and his brother Richard Band, the company's main film music composer. The history of the company is in many ways the history of this remarkable family.

Albert Band, born in France on May 7, 1924, is the son of impressionist painter Max Band.

He began as an assistant editor at Warners in the '40s and became involved with John Huston as production assistant and did some writing on *THE ASPHALT JUNGLE* (1950) and was assistant director and co-screenwriter for Huston's adaptation of *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE* (1951).

Band went off in the late '50s after those experiences, directed such films as *I BURY THE LIVING* and *FACE OF FIRE*. He found as the '50s closed that he was being pulled more and more into live television, which he wasn't interested in. Albert Band decided to pack off the family and try his luck as a journeyman director and producer in Paris, where he failed to find work for a year before



**CHARLES BAND
FILMOGRAPHY**
By John Thonen

"The movies are so seldom great art, that if we can't appreciate great trash, there is little reason to go."
—Pauline Kael

I judge low-budget films by a different criteria than major films. My logic is that if Coppola takes \$60 million, a top cast and crew and manages to make a pretty good film (DRACULA), it's not that impressive. If Charles Band produces a pretty good film with an unknown cast, a little known crew and a budget less than Coppola's pasta per diem (SUBSPECIES II), that's impressive.

For this reason, the four-star rating I give DRAGONWORLD or TRANCERS is not quite the same as the identical rating for a T2 or ROBOCOP. They are all "Best of Class," but very different classes. What follows is a selective filmography of the best and the worst of Band's low-budget oeuvre, from his beginnings in soft-core porn to his Full Moon low-budget triumphs.

★★★★ Excellent
★★★ Good
★★ Fair
★ Poor

**MANSION OF
THE DOOMED aka
EYES OF DR. CHANEY** ★

Directed by Charles Band. 1975. 89 mins. Starring: Richard Basehart, Gloria Grahame, Lance Henriksen, Trish Stewart.

A 21-year-old Band produced and directed this ripoff of Franju's classic, LES YEUX SAN VISAGE (EYES WITHOUT A FACE). The tasteless story offers Basehart as a surgeon obsessed with restoring his daughter's sight via experimental transplants. Well acted by the veteran performers, but most notable for an early appearance of genre favorite Lance Henriksen (the first victim), and for an expected but seriously sick, climax.

The poster credits Michael Pataki as director on Band's first effort, with makeup by Stan Winston.

moving to Rome and better fortune. Charles Band was 11 and his brother, film composer Richard Band, was nine when they made their first film appearance as young boys in the Hercules imitation THE AVENGER in 1962.

Rome had become a busy film center, being dubbed "Hollywood on the Tiber" and the Bands wound up staying for 11 years. "I must say looking back, it was a great experience for a lot of reasons," said Charles Band. "He [Albert] made a number of spaghetti westerns and epics, pictures with Steve Reeves and Joseph Cotten and Robert Ryan, and it was a wonderful ten year-plus stretch in Italy. "On my father's pictures he put me to work doing just about every job imaginable on the set, some fun and some not too fun. As I was getting a little older, 14, 15, I was making little art films and documentary shorts, and I was fortunate enough at a very early age to get a lot of experience on the set."

Albert Band recalled, "Charlie started in high school in Rome shooting shorts and stuff like that. Then we got back here in 1970, and he started putting together a little horror picture. My son has always been in love with horror pictures, science fiction, fantasy—his whole company has been built on his love of these things. That's all he does." Of his influences, Charles Band noted, "I grew up exposed to the really terrific Italian cinema of the '60s; I grew up exposed to the Marvel Comic Books, which I was a big fan of and still am."

When the Band family came back to the United States in late 1970 they found rough times. Charles Band himself worked at selling ties on Hollywood Boulevard, but being very entrepreneurial, he wound up launching a gift item business that did very well. He sold bound edition copies of the original L.A. Times or New York

“My son has always been in love with horror pictures, science fiction and fantasy—his whole company has been built on his love of this.”

—Director Albert Band—



Band directs Demi Moore in PARASITE, her 1982 3-D film debut, a gory, futuristic post-holocaust tale made to cash-in on the passing craze for 3-D.

WITHOUT A FACE (aka THE HORROR CHAMBER OF DR. FAUSTUS) featuring gruesome effects by a young Stan Winston.

"I was making approximately a picture every eight or nine months, mostly as producer," explained Charles Band. "I directed a few: CRASH with Jose Ferrer and Sue Lyon, the unrated CINDERELLA, which by today's standards is an R-rated show, LASER-BLAST, PARASITE with Demi Moore, etc." It was while working on PARASITE (1982) that Charles Band met his current wife, Debra Dion, who was hired as a production assistant before she had even graduated from UCLA film school.

"In 1977, from being a film collector and videotape guy, which at that time was a very small club," said Band, "I recognized there was something very wonderful about having even a bad print of a movie for screening in the privacy of your own home. When

Times from the date of one's birth.

With the revenues of that business, Charles Band managed to make his first picture in 1975 at the age of 21, MANSION OF THE DOOMED (aka THE EYES OF DR. CHANEY), starring Richard Basehart, Gloria Grahame and Lance Henriksen, which was a tacky retreat of Franju's EYES

I got wind of the Beta format, [and of] Andre Blay, who licensed 20 films from 20th Century-Fox and set up a company called Mag Video in the Stone Age of video, I thought it was absolutely wonderful and was going to be very successful. So I decided to go out and do my own video label.

"I went around to a bunch of independent distributors who

Filming Richard Basehart as the mad eye-gouger Dr. Chaney in MANSION OF THE DOOMED, Band's film debut, produced and directed at the age of 21.



had successful films out theatrically, pictures like *TUNNELVISION*, *FLESH GORDON*, *THE GROOVE TUBE*, *HALLOWEEN*, *TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE* and I put this limited catalog together of these kind of successful, high-profile theatrical releases. I called it Meda Home Entertainment. Meda was my first wife's name. In 1978 I started that label.

"Originally I started it up as a hobby, it was just in the back of my little facility that we were making movies out of. We started very simple and very low-key, and within two years it just totally overtook my life. It became a hungry beast sort of business."

Unfortunately for Band, to gain capital to expand his business, the inexperienced entrepreneur took on some partners who gained control of the business, a business that according to Band was doubling every month. "The video business just exploded," he said, "and every time we needed money, which was virtually every month—I needed cash flow—I'd do a deal with these people. They'd take two more points of the company in return for a certain loan. If the business was predictable, which at the time it wasn't, then the cash flow and all the planning would have worked out, but I'm a player, the business doubled, and suddenly we needed more tape, more machines and more everything. So little by little they kept eating away at my stock until finally they had control."

Charles Band sold out his interest in the company in early 1980 and about 18 months later, that was sold to Heron, who bought the company for \$20 million. When Band sold the company, his partners added an "i" to the name so that Meda became Media. Band was also behind the Wizard label, which distributed a number of rare and cult European films in this country for the first time, sometimes under alternate titles, as well as films like the infamous *I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE*, which became an incredible seller on video.

Then Band decided to go af-

"Looking back on it, *MANSION OF THE DOOMED* was an interesting first film," said Band. "Stan Winston did the makeup. Lance Henriksen had his first major role in it. Andy [THE FUGITIVE, UNDER FIRE] Davis was my director of photography. To put that team back together today would take millions."

CINDERELLA

Directed by Michael Pataki. 1976. 87 mins. Starring: Cheryl "Rainbeaux" Smith, Sy Richardson, Kirk Scott, Brett Smiley.

Character actor Pataki, later playing the lead in *DRACULA'S DOG*, paired with Band on this X-rated musical-comedy. A drive-in staple in its time, and later available on video. The presence of Cheryl Smith, also in Band's *LASERBLAST*, does give the film a certain cult stature.

"When you're starting out you end up giving your movies away to distributors, just to get them out there," said Band. "There were theaters where it [*CINDERELLA*] played for 20-22 weeks. It was a huge theatrical hit, but you have to hope the distributors are honest in their accounting, and they weren't. I never made any money."



LASERBLAST, an early Band hit in the wake of *STAR WARS*, and his first film with David Allen.

CRASH

Directed by Charles Band. 1976. 78 mins. Starring: Jose Ferrer, Sue Lyon, John Carradine.

Band returned to directing with this confusing tale of infidelity, sorcery and auto shop, produced in response to Universal's heavily hyped *THE CAR* and, in classic exploitation style, Band managed to get his knock-off into theaters the same year. Like many of Band's pre-Empire titles, this one is disjointed and at times hard to follow. The story, about a wealthy man (Ferrer) who uses witchcraft to send a demonically possessed car to kill his wife (Lyon), is undeniably strange, but none too good.

END OF THE WORLD

Directed by John Hayes. 1976. 86 mins. Starring: Christopher Lee, Sue Lyon, MacDonald Carey, Dean Jagger.

An odd and disjointed story, almost made palatable by a solid cast. Lee is a space alien masquerading as a priest. Lyon is a scientist out to stop his plan to destroy the Earth, whose polluted atmosphere is a threat to all the solar system. Deadly dull, but memorable for the ending, which finds Lee and his alien nuns (a great title for a Troma film) escaping with Lyon as the Earth explodes. Amazingly, this



One of Empire's unfiled trial balloons in the foreign sales arena, a 1986 sequel to Band's early hit.

saw theatrical play the same year as *CE3K*. This, and Band's previous two efforts were a common drive-in triple bill that year.

FAIRY TALES

Directed by Harry Tampa. 1976. 85 mins. Starring: Don Sparks, Prof. Irwin Corey, Sy Richardson, Nai Bonet.

Band returned to *CINDERELLA* territory with this soft-core, musical sex-comedy featuring the debut of Linnea Quigley. Like *CINDERELLA*, a relatively harmless sex comedy, similar to recent releases on Band's Torchlight video label. Its nudity and simulated sex would probably garner an R-rating today. A relic from the days when sex was fun in films, and not a precursor to death.

LASERBLAST

Directed by Michael Raeburn. 1978. 85 mins. Starring: Kim Milford, Cheryl Smith, Roddy McDowall, Keenan Wynn.

Milford is the standard "rebel without a cause" teen, albeit one with an alien ray gun, in a dull sci-fi entry that never makes much sense. The film has a small cult following thanks to the presence of Cheryl "Rainbeaux" Smith, David Allen's animated aliens, and a genuinely amusing scene where Milford uses his weapon to blast a *STAR WARS* billboard to pieces.

DRACULA'S DOG— aka ZOLTAN: HOUND OF DRACULA

Directed by Albert Band (Alfredo Antonini). 1978. 90 mins. Starring: Michael Pataki, Jose Ferrer, Reggie Nalder.

Not as bad as it sounds (how could it be). The senior Band manages to play this one straight with a touch of atmospheric visuals that harken to his Italian heritage. Character actor (and *CINDERELLA* director) Pataki, is effective here as a blood relative of Dracula's, who is uninterested in his heritage, or his relative's canine legacy. The always disquieting Reggie Nalder plays a Renfield type who is the title animal's best friend.

But according to Charles Band, the connection of this to his filmography is purely familial. "I wasn't in it. I didn't produce it. It wasn't even my dog."

TOURIST TRAP

Directed by David Schmoeller. 1979. 79 mins. Starring: Tanya Roberts, Chuck Connors, Jocelyn Jones.

An odd horror item that got wide release in the wake of *HALLOWEEN*'s surprise success. Connors runs the title location, a deserted wax museum filled with mannequins that seem to have a life of their own. Along with Don Coscarelli's original *PHANTASM*, this is one of the few films that truly feels like a nightmare. The film's ending, like many of Band's early efforts, is truly nihilistic. It would be tough to get a film this bleak made today, let alone get it into theaters. Atmospherically directed by Schmoeller and largely incomprehensible, but not ineffective.

THE DAY TIME ENDED aka TIMEWARP aka VORTEX

Directed by John "Bud" Cardos. 1980. 80 mins. Starring: Jim Davis, Dorothy Malone, Marcy Lafferty, Chris Mitchum.

Wildly imaginative, and frequently indecipherable, fantasy adventure that ran millions over budget and virtually bankrupted Band's fledgling production company, delaying the upcoming production of David Allen's *THE PRIMEVALS*, for more than a decade.

"[Director] Bud Cardos had a very definite idea what he wanted, and Charlie Band had another one, but they never communicated," noted producer Wayne Schmidt. "We were stuck in the middle with no authority. We couldn't even sign checks."

The story which makes less sense as it goes along, concerns a family whose isolated, self-contained home is swept up by a space/time anomaly. They encounter tiny flying creatures, battle backyard dinosaurs and a glowing city of light, effects that range from good to awful.



PARASITE boasts fine 3-D from cinematographer Mac Ahlberg (r) a frequent Band collaborator.

PARASITE

Directed by Charles Band. 1982. 85 mins. Starring: Robert Glaudini, Demi Moore, Luca Bercovici.

A gory, futuristic tale, quickly produced to cash in on the short-lived 3-D revival of the '80s. It's a post-holocaust tale of *ALIEN*-inspired, gut-bursting creatures, that is ultimately strictly for gore mavens. Mac Ahlberg's fine 3-D photography made this gruesome fun in theaters, but seen "flat," it's just that.

Lead Glaudini would later write *THE ALCHEMIST* and co-star Bercovici would direct *GHOULIES*,

both for Band, and no less than Academy-Award winner Stan Winston created the title creatures. The film's place in film history book footnotes and Trivial Pursuit games is assured by the debut presence of later superstar, Demi Moore.

EMPIRE BUILDING

DUNGEONMASTER ★

Directed by: Charles Band, John Carl Buechler, Rosemarie Turko, David Allen, Steve Fore, Peter Manoogian, Ted Nicolaou. 1983. 80 mins. Starring: Charles (Richard) Moll, Jeffrey Byron, Leslie Wing.

After six minutes of credits (most of it just to list all those directors) are excised, this is a scant 67-minute film that still manages to move like molasses. The premise is that in order to rescue his girl from the title villain (Moll), Byron must face seven challenges. In an ambitious, but ill-considered, experiment, Band had each challenge helmed by a different, neophyte director. As they had previously, and often have since, David Allen's effects sequences provide about the only point of interest in a film that isn't just "less than the sum of its parts," it's just parts that never really equal anything at all.

"I learned a lot," said Allen. "Each segment had to be done in two days. I was scouting locations only 20 minutes ahead of the camera crew."



Band (l) directs Jeffrey Byron as Dogen in *METALSTORM*, a 3-D effort that earned a major release.

METALSTORM: THE DESTRUCTION OF JARED SYN ★

Directed by Charles Band. 1983. 84 mins. Starring: Jeffrey Byron, Mike Preston, Kelly Preston, Tim Thomerson, Richard Moll.

This film got wider than usual release for a Band production when Universal, eager for a 3-D follow-up to *JAWS 3D*, offered it to exhibitors to help amortize their investment in the process. Like Full Moon's release, *OBLIVION*, this sci-fi tale is essentially a western. The bland and lifeless Byron plays a hot-headed lawman up against villain Preston (fresh from *THE ROAD WARRIOR*) and his one armed, right-hand man Baal. Like many early Band films, this often makes little sense and seems more a collection of scenes instead of a cohesive story. Its low-budget effects are surprisingly effective and Mac Ahlberg again proves himself the master of the 3-D camera. This was a surprise hit and far more profitable for Universal than the big-budgeted *JAWS* sequel. The film may best be remembered for having the most meaningless title

FULL MOON PREVIEW

THE PRIMEVALS

Effects expert David Allen and Band film a long-cherished dream project.

By Dennis Fischer

THE PRIMEVALS, thanks to *Cinefantastique's* 1978 cover story, is perhaps the most documented unrealized fantasy film project of all time. What began as a boyhood dream of famed stop-motion animator David Allen—to design, animate, write, produce and direct his own feature film—has recently finished principal photography and is now in a year-long postproduction phase for Full Moon release later this year.

The film's story began life as an Edgar Rice Burroughs-style Edwardian adventure story called *RAIDERS OF THE STONE RING*, which Allen worked on in collaboration with Jim Danforth and future special effects Academy Award-winner Dennis Muren. They sought to get a production entity interested in the story. Allen hoped to make it his directing debut, then titled *ZEPPELIN VS. PTERODACTYLS*, for Hammer Films.

Allen was introduced to Charles Band by makeup artist Steve Neill, who had worked with Band on *END OF THE WORLD*. Allen left his job with CPC, a television commercial studio he'd been at for many years, and devoted his studio full time to the preproduction of *PRIMEVALS* in the late '70s, once Band expressed an interest in the project while persuading Allen to provide stop-motion rep-



Trapped by the Yeti, Julett Mills as Dr. Collier and Richard Joseph Paul as Matt Conner, filmed for Full Moon in Romania.

tilian aliens for *LASERBLAST*, which gave that particular film its only moment of interest.

"Charlie was already familiar with animation," said Allen. "I realized that he was very aware of Ray Harryhausen movies, and I think by looking at the kinds of things he's been asking me to do over the years, I would guess that *JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS* made a special impression on him.

"Of course I would have loved to have jumped right in and done *PRIMEVALS* immediately, although I'm quite sure I was probably not sufficiently mature professionally to undertake a project of that size at that time. I probably didn't know that. In any case, *LASERBLAST* was something that was more

manageable, so I started to do that for him."

After five or six months preproduction work on *THE PRIMEVALS*, Charles Band Productions was unable to find financing. Allen went back to work for Band after the formation of Empire Pictures and made his directorial debut on a segment of *DUNGEONMASTER*, featuring a stop-motion animated stone idol. Once more the *PRIMEVALS* project was revived. However, Band didn't have confidence in Allen as a writer and contacted a few other writers to look into the project. A writer who worked on *HIGHLANDER* was called in but wasn't on Allen's wavelength. Danny Bilson and Paul De-

Meo, who had just done *TRANCERS* and *ELIMINATORS* and would go on to do *THE FLASH* and *ROCKETEER*, were also consulted, but it came to naught.

"Then, of course, Charlie said, 'Before we do *PRIMEVALS*, help me out a little bit with this little *ROBOJOX* picture,' the Stuart Gordon thing, which turned out to be far from a little film," remembers Allen. "That picture lasted longer than Empire did and had to be finished by Columbia."

Allen went back to work for Band after the formation of Full Moon, and throughout it all, Band has been committed to allowing Allen to achieve his vision on *PRIMEVALS*, an old-fashioned high adventure with romantic—in the sense of something heroic, adventurous, re-



The opening attack of the Yeti, production design by Ron Lizzorty, David Allen and renderer Lee McCloud. With a full year of stop-motion effects post-production, Full Moon expects to open their fantasy epic theatrically in early 1996.

mote, mysterious, idealized—overtones and eye-opening effects, coupled with a meaningful story that would comment on the human condition in the way Nigel Kneale did with FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH.

PRIMEVALS is about a Yeti, an abominable snowman, who is discovered in the early scenes of the picture on a rampage in a Sherpa village. The slain monster winds up being studied by people in a university setting. The university people comprise the main characters.

"There is an elder female scientist that I based many years ago on the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead," explained Allen. "Her name is Claire Collier and she is played by Juliet Mills. The disaffected anthropologist, Matthew Connor, who was once her prize student turned rebel, is played by the star of OBLIVION, Richard Joseph Paul. That was casting the Bands urged upon me and I think it turned out fairly well.

"The part of a professor in the university, a colleague of Collier's, Lloyd Trent, is played by Robert Cornthwaite (THE THING, MATINEE), who did a day or two over in Romania," recalled Allen. "That was a lot of fun."

The scientists go on a Yeti-

“The home office liked what they were seeing, but not the reality that we were getting a day behind every two weeks.”

—Director David Allen—

searching expedition to Nepal and hook up with Rondo Montana, played by Leon Russom, a tracker and ex-safari guy who takes them to the Sherpas. Kathleen Reidel, played by Walker Brandt, is a more recent student of Claire Collier's in the university who is doing field research with the Sherpas in Nepal and was actually in the locale when the Yeti attack occurred and was instrumental in getting the specimen prepared quickly for shipment to the states.

The expedition also brings along the oldest boy of the family Reidel was staying with, named Siker, played by Vietnamese actor Tai Thai. His family is wiped out by the Yeti attacks, so in seeking vengeance he joins the expedition and helps them find the valley of the Yetis, and then comes to discover that the Yetis aren't really responsible for what they've done.

Allen doesn't want to reveal

everything about his story, which isn't as revolutionary now as it was 20 years ago. However, we can tell you that the expedition comes "into a little miniature ecosystem of some kind, a habitat. There were alien—not an invasion because it was before human societies formed—but experiments on the animal life of our planet by creatures from another

world, and the experiments went badly out of control for reasons that are set forth in the film."

Despite his happiness at finally bringing his project to fruition, Allen discovered the way still fraught with incredible difficulties, not the least of which was having to film in foreign locations. For example, the Pennine Alps were used to substitute for the Himalayas, but filming was so delayed into late summer that most of the snow had melted.

Shifting filming to Full Moon's Romanian studios' production base, Allen credited his cameraman, Adolfo Bartoli, with believing in the film and being very supportive. "He had some of his crew from Italy helping," said Allen. "He's pretty happy with the mixed [Romanian and Italian] crew. Adolfo was very helpful on this picture, particularly as he's been in that whole Romanian loop for

ter the media market in a different way. He was beginning to make a picture called SWORD-KILL in 1982, about a samurai who was frozen in ice, when he realized something. "I had watched all these foreign film representatives take my pictures, license my pictures, and basically go to Cannes and Mifed [the two major foreign film markets], rent an office and make sales, and make a huge commission on basically the fruits of my labor. I thought if I was going to have any control at all, I should go to the foreign marketplace and sell my own stuff, especially since over the years my pictures did very well for everyone. They were very commercial.

"I got many letters from French distributors and Japanese distributors, congratulatory letters saying here's a copy of our advertising campaign as a memento. So I kind of knew some of the players. I decided to take SWORDKILL, which was just about to shoot, and a couple of other pictures, which I was going to make later that year, and hang my shingle in some hotel room in Cannes and actually begin doing it myself."

Band came up with the name Empire and the company was formed as Empire International, which, with the aid of Band's promo reel, was also able to raise funds for upcoming, in-

Whitney Anderson and Dave Buzzota with the doll-size dinosaurs of Moonbeam's PREHYSTERIA 3.



ever, since there is no Metalstorm and Jared Syn is not destroyed.

TRANCERS ★★★★★

Directed by Charles Band. 1984. 76 mins. Starring: Tim Thomerson, Helen Hunt, Art LaFleur, Telma Hopkins.

Band has most often proven to be at his best as a producer, not a director. TRANCERS is the notable exception. While certainly derivative, this is a stylish, amusing and imaginative story that evolved into a seriously uneven series at Full Moon. Thomerson's Jack Deth is obviously inspired by the hard-boiled detective films of the '40s, but patterning his futuristic world after those same film noir classics was inspired. Every facet of the film is on the money, especially its superb casting.

This tale of a time-traveling cop had been bouncing around the Empire production offices for a while before Band gave screenwriters Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo a crack at it. Together they achieved a kind of genre synergy that none of them have since duplicated.

"It took five years for us to get our script for THE ROCKETEER into production," said DeMeo. "From the day we gave Charlie the TRANCERS script, to the day it opened in theaters I don't think it was five months. That's the joy of working with him. If he likes it, he does it. None of this 'development hell' nonsense."



Michael Des Barres and the titular puppets by John Carl Buechler in Band's GREMLINS knock-off hit.

GHOULIES ★

Directed by Luca Bercovici. 1984. 81 mins. Starring: Lisa Pelikan, Jack Nance, Scott Thomson.

Band managed to release this the same year as its obvious inspiration, GREMLINS, and found his biggest theatrical success to date in makeup man John Carl Buechler's unconvincing creations. Band himself has admitted that most of its success was due to the infamous poster, depicting one of the fanged title beasts rising from a toilet bowl, beside the tag line "They'll get you in the end." The film's story of obnoxious teens encountering witchcraft has none of the poster's humor, and the effect is mostly lifeless hand-held puppets. Three sequels followed, but only #2 was under Band's auspices, none an improvement.

ZONE TROOPERS ★★★★★

Directed by Danny Bilson. 1984. 86 mins. Starring: Tim Thomerson, Timothy Van Patten, Art LaFleur.

Bilson, and writing partner DeMeo (who also produced) came up with another fun genre bender

many pictures before mine, and he knew how they work, how they think, what was available.

"He has a lot of the equipment we used, the camera dollies and lens packages were his own. He was very protective of the film, I feel, and he's a very temperamental man. Occasionally we had our differences, but basically he believed in the film and was a big help to me. We did as good a job as we could under those conditions."

Full Moon's recent financial difficulties had an effect on the production, which nevertheless soldiered on. Allen has tried to distance himself from these difficulties and has no clear idea even of what the budget for the film is. It's important, Allen noted, that Full Moon honor its obligations, particularly with reference to actors who will be needed to come back and loop some of their lines. Full Moon said that process was about to begin in February.

"When you're in the middle of a crisis, you can't stop to think about whether or not you're maintaining equilibrium in some commendable way," commented Allen. "You can't stop to give yourself ribbons. You're dealing with it, and of course the home office here were very ambivalent about the course of production. I think they were very excited about the film that they were seeing until the labs cut them off and they weren't able to see anymore. Then what was left was the reality that we were getting a day behind every week or two." Full Moon denied their lab ever stopped sending them footage.

It's a fact of life that films frequently face difficulties, but on a limited budget and short schedule, the loss of a few days borders on disaster. Plus, noted Allen, "A ten-week movie in Romania is not a ten-week movie in L.A. The machine is not that intricate or well-oiled;

“A ten-week movie in Romania is not a ten-week movie in L.A. The machine is not that well-oiled. We improvised.”

—Director David Allen—



Dr. Collier (Juliet Mills) and Matt Conner (Richard Joseph Paul) find an extraterrestrial experimental ecosystem in the Himalayas. Below: Allen directs.



it's not that well put together. Things are improvised."

At the end of the Yeti sequence at the beginning of the film, there was supposed to be an avalanche that buries the Yeti. "When we got there, they had a couple of bags about the size of a potato sack of chopped-up styrofoam," recalled Allen with disbelief. "That was the avalanche! You suspect that they knew that wouldn't be what you wanted, but they could at least point to something that they did, so they didn't have nothing, but what they had might as well have been nothing. They said it takes

a long time or that styrofoam costs a lot to chop up. But that's not an answer.

"I have to laugh if I think about the directors I've seen in action like Michael Ritchie or Ivan Reitman. They are like spoiled sons of the sultan. They expect these things without even having to ask twice, and they have aggressive producers behind them working ahead of them making sure that they don't have to be stupefied in confronting those situations like I did every day."

Allen doesn't expect to fool people into thinking THE PRIMEVALS was a \$20-30 million production. "It's probably going to show its problems now and then," he said. "It's going to be a strange kind of picture. In one way, it's kind of low-budget and you might look at it and say that it has not been adequately produced for the stretch of the theme, and then sometimes it will look pretty extravagant. You may think you know what it's capable of, and then I think it will surprise you."

PRIMEVALS is a far cry from the typical Full Moon exploitation films, with their requisite gore or big breasted babes. Allen feels that the film will appeal on many levels, not just that of spectacle endemic to all special effects pictures, but also to the film's nobility of purpose and his characters' ethical values.

"There's a line that I like very much that I did," he said. "When Collier is standing in the wreck of a spaceship from a long ago time and looks down from this podium where the alien hologram was speaking but has disintegrated, and they are judging the meaning of what they've just seen and what they ought to do, she says, 'From the top of this mountain, hundreds of centuries are looking down on us.' I like that line because it's kind of romantic, and I don't think you hear a line like that in too many films these days." □



Band visits on the set of PREHYSTERIA with son Harlan. Inset: With wife Debbie Dion, who shepherds the company's new Moonbeam label, hosting a dinner for video retailers to promote the filming of Full Moon's SHRUNKEN HEADS.

complete projects as well as SWORDKILL. In order to pre-sell domestic rights on an independent picture, one needed to guarantee a certain amount of "p and a" or prints and ads expenditure, so Band figured he ought to set up a modest U.S. theatrical distribution organization and begin to distribute these pictures in order to later sell them to the burgeoning U.S. video market.

Empire was notable for announcing far more films than it actually made. Explained Band, "That was another way people did business. That really was a way of saying, 'Hey, filmmaking community, this is what I want to make, do you guys want to buy it?' to a degree. If everybody gyrated towards three of

the ten projects announced, those got made and the other ones for some reason didn't. It was like a test."

Suddenly, Empire Pictures seemed to blossom into a major player on the scene, becoming in effect the AIP of the '80s. "Very, very quickly, from '83 to '85," noted Band, "Empire went from a company that made a couple of pictures to a company that made—at most—eight in one particular year. We bought a studio—I bought the former de Laurentiis Studio in Rome because at that time the dollar was very strong and it was very affordable to make pictures in Italy. Any excuse to

go to Italy was good for me; I grew up there and I loved it." In 1985 Band even purchased a castle outside of Rome. But Band's video Empire was about to fall.

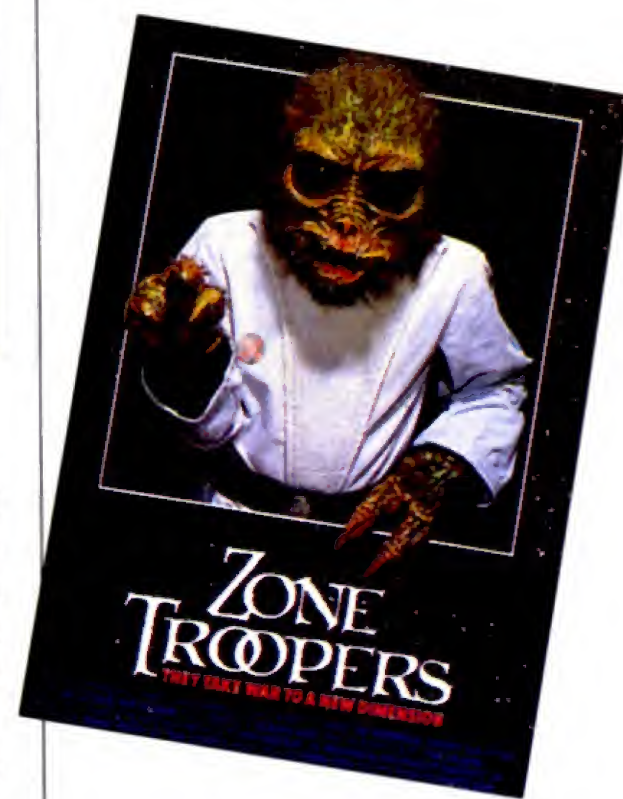
Explained Band, "Basically, in a nutshell, we had some bad timing. We'd just set up a big operation in Italy and suddenly the dollar absolutely fell apart and the cost of living in Italy quadrupled, so suddenly we were in the wrong country in terms of getting a shop set up and making movies. We were there to save money, and the last few pictures we made at Empire cost 20 or 30% more than it would have to make them in this country, which is totally insane considering that just to shoot the picture offshore there is an awful lot of effort that goes into traveling, etc."

Added Albert Band, "In the beginning, you got 2000 lira to the dollar. When we left, it was 600. The whole Italian experience marked us for life, me and my children, because those years were very formative, not just in growing up, but growing up in a different culture, living with a different language, making movies we liked, building an empire."

Empire was faced with some other problems as well. As Charles Band noted, "The other

continued on page 27

here, though the results fall a little short of their TRANCERS triumph. This was the first Empire production to be shot overseas, in Italy, a technique Band has continued to use with current Full Moon productions. The low budget shows, but it's the kind of comic book fun at which Bilson and DeMeo excel. This time around the writing duo combine sci-fi with WW II films as a small band of ragtag soldiers, in the midst of battling Nazis, encounter an alien spaceship and its inhabitants. John Carl Buechler's alien makeups are only a couple of steps above a Halloween mask but a full-scale space ship is impressive. The cast is perfect for their stock roles.



Another genre bender from the talented TRANCERS writing team of Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo.

"This was a film that no one but Charlie would have let us make," said DeMeo. "We helped cast it, build sets and props. I even ran the cable-control mechanism for the lead alien's face. There's not a film school in the world that can teach you what six months with Charlie will."

RE-ANIMATOR ★★★★★

Directed by Stuart Gordon. 1984. 86 mins. Starring: Jeffrey Combs, David Gale, Barbara Crampton.

Despite the controversy over who was actually involved in the film's inception (producer Brian Yuzna says Band came on board in post-production) there seems little doubt that Band had the wherewithal to recognize the film's merits, and that it was his marketing expertise that

David Gale as the deliciously mad and headless Dr. Hill in Stuart Gordon's amazing RE-ANIMATOR.



The rock group Sykotic Sinfoney (l to r), Stanky Poozle, Zold Zweetle and Crusty Udeer in BAD CHANNELS, as aliens take charge of a radio station.



earned it attention in the mainstream press.

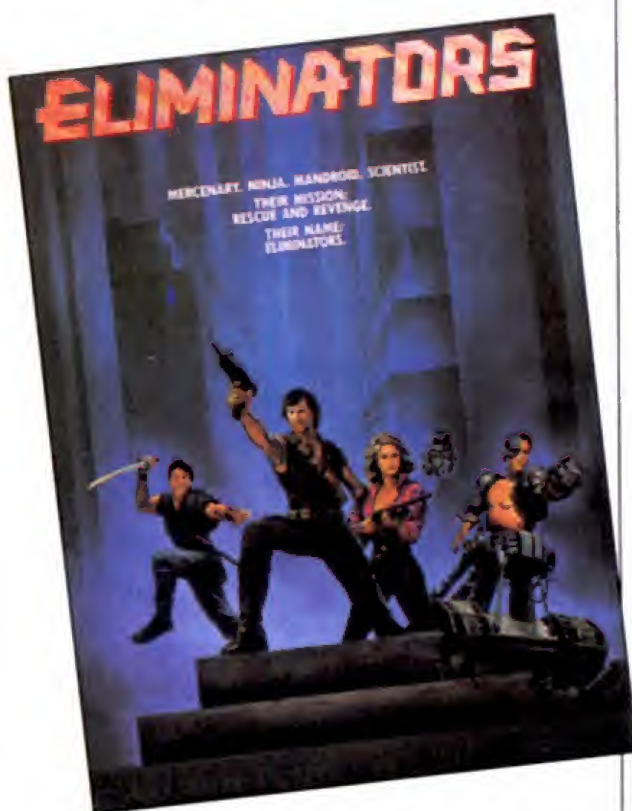
This is an almost flawless exercise in low-budget, genre filmmaking. Like John Carpenter, Sam Raimi, George Romero, etc., Gordon may never surpass the perverse serendipity of this, his debut directorial effort.

TROLL ★★

Directed by John Carl Buechler. 1986. 86 mins. Starring: Michael Moriarty, Shelley Hack, Phil Fondararo.

The critical success of RE-ANIMATOR encouraged Band to take advantage of the notoriety and take his next several pictures into wide theatrical release. Never mind that they didn't merit it.

This was makeup man John Carl Buechler's concept, originally intended as an R-rated Roger Corman production. It was re-tailored to Band's desire for a PG-13 film, making for an uneasy mix of GHOULIES and ET. Buechler's "slasher" styled tale of a murderous troll, became a series of fantasy vignettes, as the title character places residents of an apartment building into fantasy worlds of their own making.



Another comic book genre blend scripted by Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo, starring Denise Crosby.

ELIMINATORS ★★★

Directed by Peter Manoogian. 1986. 95 mins. Starring: Roy Dotrice, Andrew Prine, Denise Crosby, Conan Lee.

Wonderful comic book nonsense, another genre-blend script by Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo, that was going to launch a series of more action-oriented Empire productions. This one has a river rat of a boat captain (obviously patterned after Bogart's AFRICAN QUEEN role), a beautiful blonde scientist (a pre-STNG Denise Crosby), a half-man/half-tank character called a "Mandroid" (later the title of a Full Moon release) and a ninja. There's also a crazed, time-traveling, mad scientist and a tribe of cavemen tossed in for good measure. This could have been a fun series and Band should consider some Full Moon follow-ups.

MOONBEAM PREVIEW

JOSH KIRBY, TIME WARRIOR

Band launches a series of six features with the cliffhanger excitement of yore.

By Dennis Fischer

Moonbeam's biggest project, JOSH KIRBY...TIME WARRIOR, is an attempt to bring back the action and appeal of old time serials. The intention was to craft six interlocking features that would be released one a month, the first five ending in cliffhangers designed to get video renters to come back and rent the next installment to find out what happens next.

Kirby and pals—Irwin 1138, a brilliant scientist; Azabeth Siege, a female warrior, and Prizm, an alien furball—will explore several exotic locations in the films: THE HUMAN PETS, PLANET OF THE DINO-KNIGHTS, TRAPPED IN TOYWORLD, JOURNEY TO THE MAGIC CAVERN, EGGS FROM 70 MILLION B.C., and LOST WORLD OF THE GIANTS.

Each film will tell a complete story, but all except for the last episode will then start a new story and create a cliffhanger. Thereby Moonbeam hopes to avoid the frustration garnered by viewers of BACK TO THE FUTURE PART II (not to mention some of their own multi-parters). The series creators, writers Cy Voris and Ethan Reiff, remind Full Moon production chief Debra Dion of "Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo, who've gone on to do THE FLASH and ROCK-ETEER. Their style of writing is so much fun for kids. They



Corbin Allred as Kirby, off to adventures in the timestream, six films released one month apart.

just focus in right on what kids like to see and what's fun."

The direction chores for the series have been split between Frank Arnold, who is directing the first, third and sixth episodes, and Ernie Farino who will do episodes 2, 4, and 5. A third director who was to have worked on the project dropped out with Arnold and Farino splitting up the leftover episodes.

Farino has had a career in visual effects work, doing optical work on both TERMINATOR movies, as well as main titles for films such as THE ABYSS. He has a background in stop-motion animation, has done armature work on CAVEMAN and THE THING, as well as animating Pillsbury's famous

Doughboy. His special effects expertise led to a new directing career.

Farino made his directorial debut doing the "Mannikins of Horror" episode of MONSTERS, went on to direct three more MONSTERS episodes as well as several episodes of the new, revived LAND OF THE LOST series and the feature STEEL AND LACE, a robot movie starring Bruce Davison and David Naughton.

Noted Farino, "It's going to be a fairly unique concept in the sense of a series of six films that have a continuing storyline, like a miniseries. It's a combination of an ongoing series and an anthology all wrapped up into one."

Frank Arnold will set up the series in the first episode, THE HUMAN PETS, which introduces us to Josh Kirby, played by 15-year-old Corbin Allred, who has been in QUEST FOR THE DELTA KNIGHTS with David Warner. Arnold made arrangements to film in Allred's hometown, Salt Lake City, before the production headed over to Full Moon's Romanian studio. Arnold shot scenes of Josh riding to school and the exterior of the school to capture a sense of genuine Americana. Full Moon noted that for union reasons, no scenes were shot of Allred.

In Romania, a MARCUS WELBY-LEAVE IT TO BEAVER kind of street set has been built to duplicate an average American neighborhood. Practicing traditional low-budg-

et economy, the same location is expected to turn up in subsequent Full Moon films, just as the same castle sets turned over and over in Corman's Poe series.

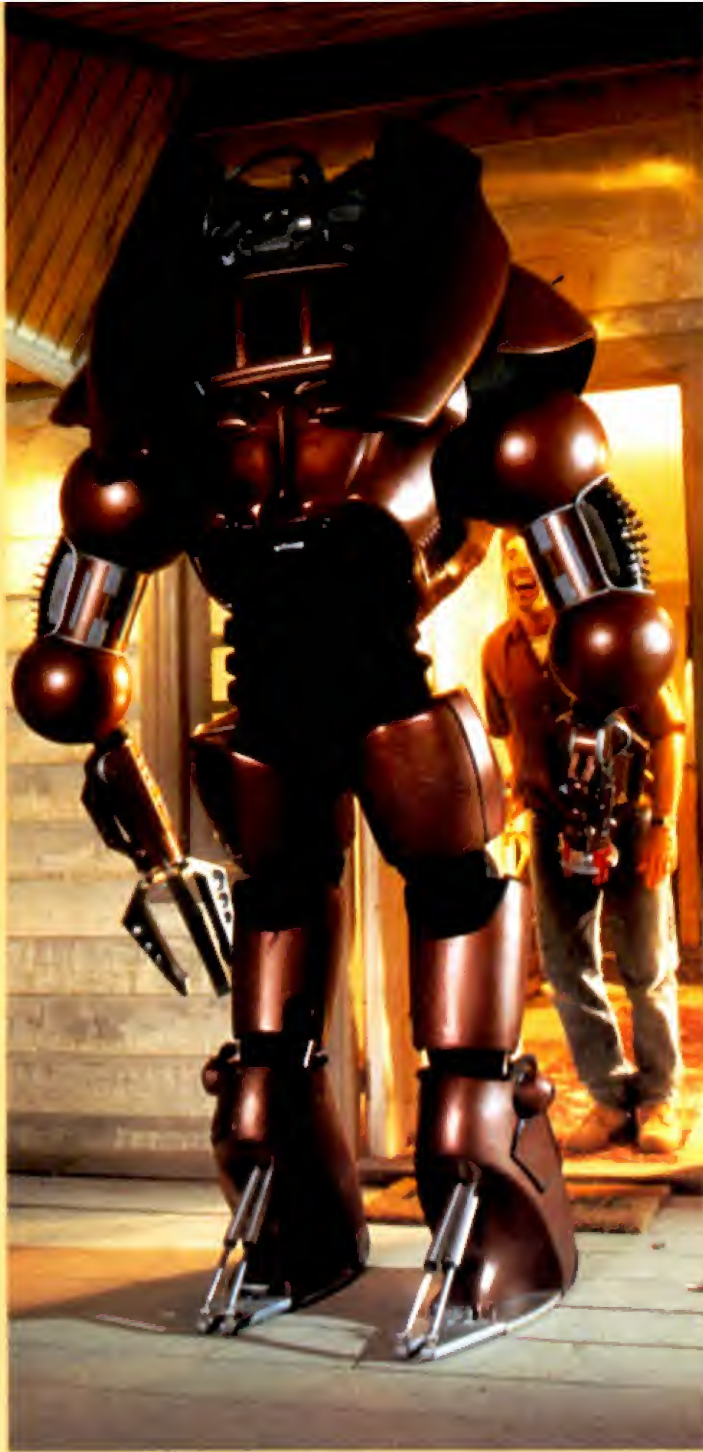
A central aspect of the series is the Timepod, which takes Kirby and his pals on their travels. "In shape and size it kind of resembles the Moonbus from 2001, but it's more fanciful, more H.G. Wellsish in a lot of ways," said Farino. "It has window panels that open and close like the ones in *FIRST MEN IN THE MOON*. All these references that you draw upon.

"We couldn't have continuous open windows because over the course of six movies you'd have endless blue screen shots during dialogue sequences during which you'd have to see something out those windows. Monitors allow them to be looking at grid maps and the usual thing."

The Timepod was designed by an unnamed German designer who will also be involved in building it. Farino noted that his Romanian designers are "more comfortable with the less hardware-oriented stuff. Their forte seems to be much more the Old World castles and that type of stuff. That's really their strength. That's where they shine."

Farino's first film for the series will be its second one, and from the description, one of the most interesting—*PLANET OF THE DINOKNIGHTS*, a medieval world where knights joust using dinosaurs for mounts. The film received a production boon in that it was able to use existing sets in Bucharest, also to be seen in a new version of *NOSTRADAMUS* starring F. Murray Abraham. The sets, as well as other genuine locations available in Romania, help give the film an authentic medieval flavor.

A variety of standard effects techniques are planned to create the fabulous dinosaur-mounts. "One of the nice things about



Dr. Zoetrope, out to eradicate existence while upsetting the timestream, an impressive robot suit conceived by Full Moon's in-house effects shop.

“It's a fairly unique concept, a series of six films with a continuing storyline, like a miniseries but with cliffhangers.”

—Director Ernie Farino—

Full Moon is that there are a lot of in-house resources," said Farino. "There's Mark Rappaport, who has the mechanical makeup effects department, and those folks do a lot of really terrific work.

"There's the visual effects department, David Allen Prods. Dave is going to be off shooting *PRIMEVALS* as we are doing these movies, so Randy Cook, who has worked on a lot of special effects projects in the past—*THE THING*, *GHOSTBUSTERS* and so on—is kind of supervising the visual effects shop for these movies and others, I'm sure.

"Mark [Rappaport] and his group will not only be doing makeup effects and so on, but some of the cable-controlled-type puppet dinosaurs. We're going to be utilizing not only existing technology but existing dinosaurs that we are going to refurbish from the stuff they still have from *PREHYSTERIA* and some of the other movies here.

"And because they have the equivalent stop-motion puppets, there will be some scenes that will be utilizing stop motion. They also have a system for computer imaging for the view traveling through the timestream, which is going to be a slitscan-type tunnel effect whipping by. They have a motion-control system, a tracking camera for traditional optical effects."

Derek Webster plays the sinister Dr. Zoetrope, who walks around in a huge, 10-foot robot suit that he propels, a sort of combination transformer and exo-skeleton. It's very different in appearance, but functionally much like Sigourney Weaver's exo-skeleton suit at the end of *ALIENS*. "The design Mark Rappaport and his group came up with here is really spectacular."

An episode with futuristic aspects is *EGGS FROM 70 MILLION B.C.*, which will be Farino's second film for the series. "In episode four, they actually go to 70,000 A.D., the time of Azabeth Siege, a 17-year-old warrior girl who also ends up getting inadvertently caught up into this whole adventure in the Timepod in the first story. She becomes part of the troupe and Josh develops a crush on her. She's a warrior chick, more Frazetta-like, played by Jennifer Burns. It's a vision of the future, Full Moon style."

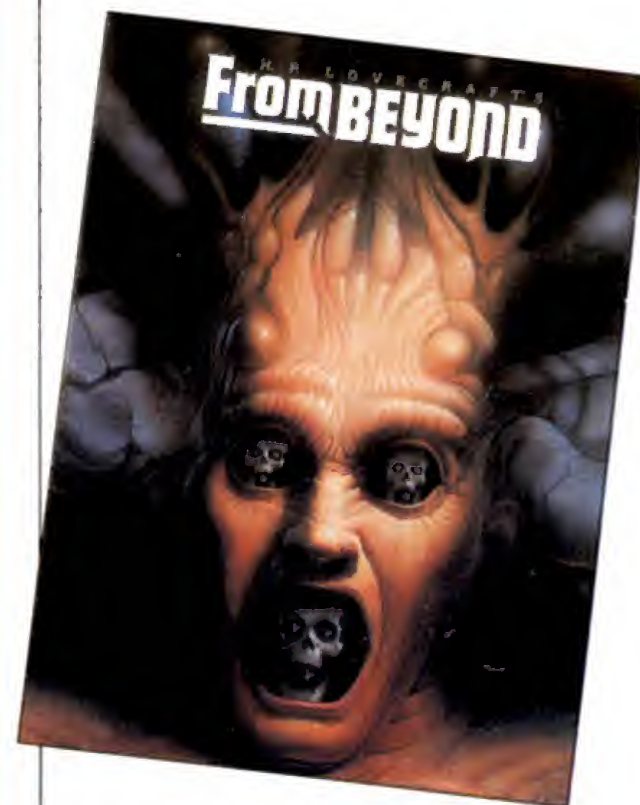
Voris and Reiff wrote episodes one, five and six, and were the overall supervising writers. Paul Callisi, a friend with feature experience, wrote

FROM BEYOND

★★

Directed by Stuart Gordon. 1986. 88 mins. Starring: Jeffrey Combs, Barbara Crampton, Ken Foree, Ted Sorel.

A bigger budget (\$4.5 million) and some stunning special effects (from four different effects houses) fail to make Gordon's second foray in Lovecraftian lore the equal of his first. Sorel isn't given enough human screentime to make the memorable villainous character that David Gale did in *RE-ANIMATOR*, and Combs and Crampton's characters are so unappealing it's impossible to care for, or about them. Still, any film that requires six submissions to earn an R rating is unlikely to disappoint fans. This is a wild and decidedly perverse tale, which Gordon saw as an AIDS allegory. It didn't quite cement Gordon's promise as a "gore auteur," but at least it kept it alive.



Gordon's second effects-laded foray into H. P. Lovecraft took six attempts to win a needed R-rating.

GHOSTWARRIOR aka SWORDKILL

★

Directed by Larry Carroll. 1986. 96 mins. Starring: Hiroshi Fujiyoka, John Calvin, Janet Julian.

In comparison to the pretentious *ICEMAN* and the humorless *ENCINO MAN*, this may be the best of the "thawed out after centuries of ice" sub-genre. But it's still pretty lame.

A samurai was frozen in a lake in 1552 and is later defrosted and brought to modern-day L.A. The humor and wonderment is largely squandered, and the handful of action scenes are indifferently staged. Dissatisfaction over pre-sales encouraged Band to

Hiroshi Fujiyoka as the thawed samurai of *SWORDKILL*, Empire's first 1983 effort, shelved till 1986.



conceive of Empire as a production and distribution entity, but even he let this one sit on the shelf for several years.

CRAWLSPACE ★★

Directed by David Schmoeller. 1986. 82 mins. Starring: Klaus Kinski, Talia Balsam, Sally Brown.

Outside of MANIAC (1980) this may be the most blatantly misogynistic of the many splatter films of the era. It's a distasteful, but not ineffective, tale of a closet Nazi landlord (is there any other kind?) who spies on his female tenants from the title location, and occasionally murders them. Kinski is typecast in the lead, but gives an entertainingly mannered and eccentric performance. Several critics pointed out the more than passing resemblance to Peter Lorre's THE LOST ONE (1951) and Michael Powell's PEEPING TOM (1960), but this stands pretty well on its own.



Band sought to distance himself from this eight-day wonder, the kind of pickup that killed Empire.

BREEDERS ★

Directed by Tim Kincaid. 1986. 77 mins. Starring: Teresa Farley, Lance Lewman, Frances Raines.

This eight-day wonder was the first of Band's direct-to-video productions, and its success served to instigate the reckless, and inferior, production glut that brought Empire from the high of RE-ANIMATOR to the low of NECROPOLIS in a few short years.

"The Empire titles are tricky because I may have come up with a title, or helped someone financially,

Jennifer Delora, awash in alien sperm in BREEDERS, released on Empire's Wizard Video label.



PLANET OF THE DINO-KNIGHTS. Patrick Clifton, who wrote THE SON-IN-LAW, came in and did episode number four: EGGS FROM 70,000 B.C., and Nick Payne wrote the third episode, TRAPPED ON TOYWORLD. Additionally, Callisii did a polish on JOURNEY TO THE MAGIC CAVERN about a land of mushroom people.

Noted Farino, who has worked with every writer except Payne, "They're not only good writers, but have been extremely responsive to the revisions required by budget or sets or those kinds of adjustments that needed to be made. I think the scripts are in pretty good shape. Even though it's going out under the Moonbeam label, for the family audience, they're not written down to that audience."

Farino is pleased that the scripts in the series are not simply churned-out formula pictures, which are far too common when it comes to low-budget fare. He anticipates that the Romanian crews will have a somewhat different rhythm and working habits than American ones, but expects to have no trouble adjusting. Fortunately, he noted, Full Moon has already done over a dozen features there.

"There are, on the average, two to three weeks to shoot these shows," said Farino, who expects the average length for the features to be 80-85 minutes "depending on how we do, so it's slightly on the shorter end of things. At the beginning of the show will be a reprise of what's happened in the previous episode and then a preview of 'stay tuned for the next episode,' so it will definitely fill out the program, but they are definitely feature length. That's a tight schedule, there's no question about it, but I think with careful planning and organization [we'll pull them off]."

“Even though it’s going out under the Moonbeam label, for the family audience, they’re not written down to that level.”

—Director Ernie Farino—



Farino's second chapter in the series sees Kirby on a planet where dinosaurs are mounted for jousting tournaments. Below: Comic relief aliens.



The series will have an Italian cinematographer, Cristiano Fugani, who shot a Full Moon picture called INVISIBLE. Fugani speaks English and has his own crew. The features will be shot using a two-camera system, similar to that of early live television, plus a second unit.

"After I finish shooting DINO-KNIGHTS," said Farino, "the movies will be shot continuously. For the crew it will be like a miniseries that goes on

for however many weeks, but when Frank returns to shoot his, I will have the opportunity, depending on the availability of the second unit and actors and so on, during that period of time to go back to do pick-up shots and inserts and things like that.

"We'll alternate. During that prep time, having done the first episode, I could then come back while he's shooting on a time or two [and] get shots that I missed or shots that I ran out of time on or shots that I intentionally put aside, such as a closeup of a hand turning a doorknob, those kinds of things where you don't want to take a lot of time on a first unit. Hopefully, those kind of production logistics will fall into place and we'll be able to maximize all the resources available to us.

"We're going to have an American script supervisor going with us as well as a Romanian script supervisor. We'll have a second unit director over there who is American. Our first A.D.s are American. We have a line producer, Jim Marella, who was over there on TRANCERS 4 last year, so some of these people have already been over there and have experience working in Romania."

Farino describes his last episode, JOURNEY TO THE MAGIC CAVERN as "fanciful. [The characters will] be more WIZARD OF OZ-ish

like the Tin Man or Scarecrow, except that they're mushroom people and have the big cap which blends down into the actor's face, and then they'll be wearing wardrobe or accoutrements that look like they are made of moss or vines. That has turned out to be a particular challenge for a number of reasons in terms of accomplishing the makeup effects and everything else that needs to be done on something like that." □



Hooked on the movies at an early age, a young Charles Band appears in a scene with Steve Reeves as an ersatz Hercules in *THE AVENGER* (1962), a film directed by father Albert Band in Italy under the *nom de film* Alfredo Antonini.

issue was that Empire, because it had to be so many things to so many different distribution media, did what all other companies did at the time and still do today, which is pick up outside product. My original idea was that Empire was to be a home for *my* films. I'm not saying I make the greatest films in the world, but my films have a certain quality, a certain consistency, people know what they're getting.

"After the first few films, which did quite well—which were pictures like *SWORD-KILL*, *RE-ANIMATOR*, *FROM BEYOND*—as Empire grew bigger and bigger, we needed to pick up outside product to fill the distribution pipeline and that was a big mistake because,

when you deal with independent product, you're in a situation where you promise money on delivery, you're committed. Then the picture comes in and it's bad. What do you do?

"Well, you got to distribute it; you got to take your money out; you got to somehow put it through the pipeline, and the problem is that Empire in the early days had a very good reputation out there at least for the consumer and the video retailers—it was still a video-driven sort of deal. They knew that if it had an Empire label on it, it was a certain kind of movie. Then all of a sudden they got a bad movie and then another bad movie, and the loyalty and credibility just went away. It became just like any other distrib-

ution entity." According to Band, Empire only produced about 14 or 18 films of the 38-40 films that it released.

Producer Brian Yuzna has long maintained that *RE-ANIMATOR*, Empire's most famous release, was an acquisition by Empire Pictures, but Charles Band sees it differently. "We totally produced that picture in-house," said Band. "Brian Yuzna came in to us with a script and he had all of the funding. A week after that picture started shooting, we looked at the material and it looked terrible. We had to let the d.p. go. I asked Mac Ahlberg to shoot the film. We were involved in every step. The first cut of that movie was a two-hour non-movie. We whittled it down, and this is not taking anything away from Stuart Gordon, who is a terrific director, but the picture was a mess."

Independent production entities finance the vast majority of films of the *cinéfantastique*, but many of the independents did not survive into the '90s, unlike Band's own Full Moon. "I would say the biggest problem was that a number of independents at the time tried to be too big too fast, and do too many things," said Band. "It was felt that because the video market was so strong at that

but many of them weren't my films," said Band, distancing himself from *BREEDERS*, and others made by director Tim Kincaid. "Empire grew, and grew too quick, and it became necessary to handle other people's films to meet the demand. In hindsight it was a big mistake. I'm proud of the 18 or so that we actually produced, but most of the pickups were pretty poor."

This tale of alien rapists hunting human virgins to spawn with, offers atrocious dialogue, abysmal acting, and lame direction along with sufficient nudity, sex and gory effects to apparently offset them. It's all dreadfully tasteless and misogynistic, bordering on the pornographic. Not too surprising since director Kincaid got his start in the N.Y. porn industry.

Kincaid's penchant for casting actors about 15 years too young to be believable in their roles, first came into evidence here with the laughable Lewman as a supposed tough veteran cop, who looks barely out of high school. Effects man Ed French pops up briefly at the end, to vainly try and explain the plot, then turns into one of his gooey alien creations.

DREAMANIAC NO ★

Directed by David DeCoteau. 1986. 82 mins. Starring: Thomas Bern, Kim McKamy, Sylvia Summers.

This was the inauspicious debut of no-budget auteur David DeCoteau, following a short stint in porno production. It also marked the start of his long, and sometimes fruitful, association with Band. This was basically DeCoteau's own production, due to be shot for \$30,000. Band stepped in, upped the budget to \$60,000, adding the film to the initial offerings in the direct-to-video mill that would eventually help pull Empire down.

The story is basically an *ELM STREET* clone about a heavy metal composer who gets tied in with an evil succubus. The bare breasts far outnumber the sets, and the gore is ladled on thick, but there is nothing to justify the film's ad campaign of being "Too Terrifying for the Silver Screen."



Lee Anne Baker in *NECROPOLIS*, one of Empire's no-budget pickups from New York's Tim Kincaid.

NECROPOLIS NO ★

Directed by Tim Kincaid. 1987. 77 mins. Starring: Lee Anne Baker, Michael Conte.

All of the films from Kincaid's New York-based Tycin productions are terrible, but *NECROPOLIS* may hold the distinction of being the worst of the lot. The story has something to do with a cursed ring and a reincarnated witch with six breasts. Bad acting, lighting,



Like father, like son: twenty-one years later, Charles Band directs David Smith in 3-D as the half-man, half-machine Baal of *METALSTORM* (1983).

direction and sound pretty well offset Ed French's competent makeup and effects. A prime example of how these no-budget pickups destroyed Empire's respectability and reputation. One can only hope that this one remains in video limbo forever.

ROBOT HOLOCAUST NO ★

Directed by Tim Kincaid. 1987. 79 mins. Starring: Norris Culf, Nadine Hart, Joel Von Ornsteiner.

Empire's ad campaign for this direct to video "epic" promised a muscular hero battling lizard-like robots and DUNE-inspired giant worms. What unsuspecting renters got was a scrawny, bad actor, who barely looked 18, actors in dreadful rubber robot costumes and people with their arms stuck in latex "snake" costumes that seem more inspired by Lamb Chop than Frank Herbert. This would have been an ambitious effort for a Jim Cameron, whose future-holocaust opening for TERMINATOR was clearly its genesis. For Tim Kincaid, the project was just insane. Video store owners, and their customers, began to wise up to Wizard's product and think twice about upcoming titles on the label. Thus began the decline and fall of Band's Empire.



Love in the world of serial killers, before NATURAL BORN KILLERS, a no-budget wonder that worked.

PSYCHOS IN LOVE ★★

Directed by Gorman Bechard. 1987. 87 mins. Starring: Carmine Capobianco, Debi Thibault.

While Gorman Bechard's other Empire contributions rank at the pinnacle of the company's worst releases, PSYCHOS IN LOVE is something of a diamond in the rough. The title tells all in this often funny tale of love in the world of serial killers. Rampant gore, corny jokes, and a cinema verité style, somehow mix in a blend that shouldn't work, but does.

The miniscule budgets that hampered Bechard and no-budget cohorts Kincaid and DeCoteau, actually enhance the feel here, which comes close to being a precursor of the tabloid TV approach we are all so familiar with today. Bechard regulars Capobianco (also co-writer) and Thibault give the best performances

FULL MOON PROFILE

ALBERT BAND

Band pere apprenticed with John Huston and directed horror films in the '50s.

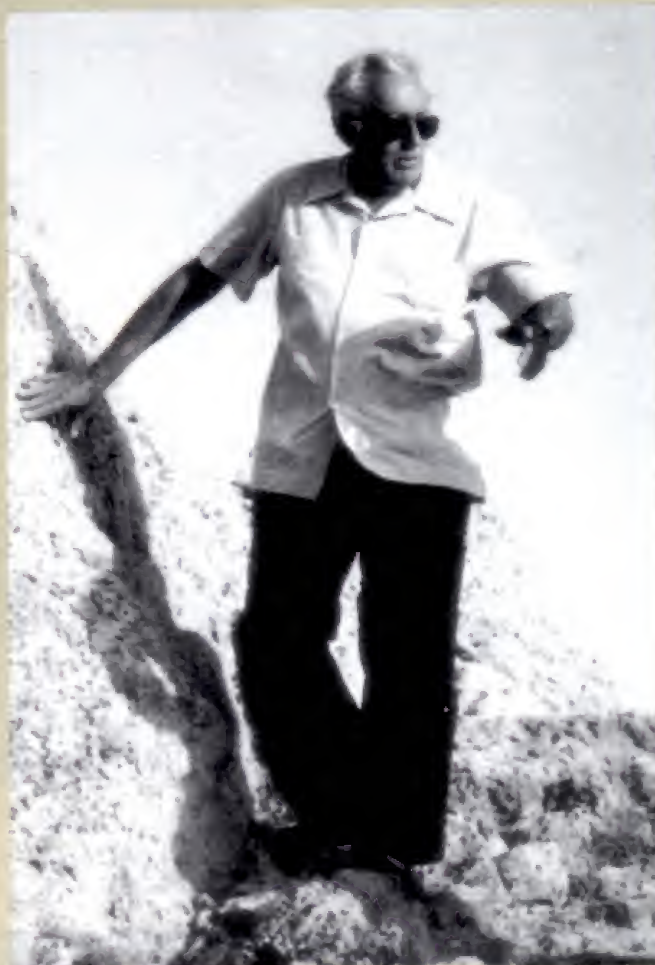
By Dennis Fischer

There's a map of a graveyard with little white and black pins stuck in it. If the white pin is removed and replaced with a black one, the owner of that particular cemetery plot dies. Such is the premise of Albert Band's nifty '50s thriller I BURY THE LIVING, which still manages to be effectively creepy despite its miniscule budget.

Albert Band has gone on to direct such films as FACE OF FIRE, DRACULA'S DOG, ROBOT WARS and DOCTOR MORDRID: MASTER OF THE UNKNOWN, the last of which he co-directed with his son Charles. He has produced such films as TROLL, TERRORVISION, and executive produced HONEY, I BLEW UP THE KID among others.

His early mentor in Hollywood was the late, great John Huston, about whom he plans to write a book. The pair worked together on the classics THE ASPHALT JUNGLE and THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE, the latter disastrously trimmed of a third of its running time after a bad sneak preview. Commented Band, "The first cut was fantastic; it was over an hour and a half. That was one of the tragedies of John's life and really in my life too, because I was deeply involved in the editing of that movie, and we thought we had a great picture.

"Unfortunately, it was way ahead of its time as a war picture. War pictures at that time, which was the 1950s, was BATTLEGROUND. War is fun. Van



Band pere, one of the pillars of Full Moon's family-run organization with a hand in development, directing ROBOT WARS in 1993.

Johnson frying his eggs in his helmet. RED BADGE wasn't fun. We had a disastrous preview. People hated it and walked out, so the studio got real scared and decided to do some editing. Unfortunately, they took half an hour out of the movie for reasons which today sound so awful, so stupid, really, really stupid."

From there, Band went into live television and directed an occasional play. In the mid-'50s he teamed up with Louis Garfinkle, who eventually won the Academy Award for his treatment of THE DEER HUNTER, and formed a production partnership. Garfinkle would write the script, they would both produce and Band would direct. Their first picture was a western called THE YOUNG GUNS

(1956). Garfinkle's next script, titled KILLER, KILLER ON THE WALL, served as the basis for I BURY THE LIVING.

"It was based on a real experience he had in Seattle," said Band. "The chairman of this cemetery committee had to devote a year of his time going into the cemetery, checking the books and everything. There was a keeper there, and that was one of his specific duties. There was a map on the wall that had black pins and white pins in the various plots of the cemetery. When Lou asked what that was, the keeper told him that the white pins were for plots that had no body. The black pins were for the plots that were occupied. So Lou thought it would be a tremendous idea

for a horror picture, and I did too. That became I BURY THE LIVING."

To star in the film the pair hired Richard Boone, who had been playing a doctor on TV. Boone is extremely effective as the skeptical but worried man who begins to believe that he can kill people merely by pushing in a little pin onto a map. Band believes in extensive rehearsals for his actors before shooting begins, which he finds a major advantage on short, low-budget shoots. The cast included Theodore Bikel, Peggy Maurer, Herb Anderson, Howard Smith, Russ Bender, Robert Osterloh, and Cyril Delevanti.

One of the most effective visuals in the film, which underscores Boone's obsession, is one



Band's '50s horror projects included the genuinely creepy *I BURY THE LIVING*, starring Richard Boone as a mortuary manager with the power of life and death.

where the secondhand on a clock turns into one of the little pins. "That was all opticals," explained Band. "We spent more money on opticals than on the movie... We found a real cemetery way down in East Los Angeles, because we wanted a flat place, not a hilly place... The rest of the locations were at a studio, the ZIV Studios out on Santa Monica."

The film was sold as having zombies despite the fact that no zombies appear in it. "That would be United Artists," explained Band. "They financed the picture and probably thought it would make more money... It was a ten-day shoot. *FACE OF FIRE* was a 49-day shoot. It was unbelievable. My background was get it done, and get it done quickly. The trick, for me, anyway even today, is to spend a lot of time on rehearsal."

The film is fairly atmospheric and showcases a sophisticated visual sense. "When I worked with John [Huston], he taught me a lot about composition," observed Band. "He'd experiment with his composition, able to do a scene by moving the camera the right direction. It took a lot of rehearsal, but again

“Very often on short schedules you have to cut with the camera. You can’t afford more coverage because you have to go faster.”

—Director Albert Band—

three or four scenes were done in one or two shots.

"I've always worked with very good directors of photography, even on a short shoot. *I BURY THE LIVING* has really got a tremendous amount of interesting camerawork. It's not just straight long-shot, medium shot, close shot at all. But that doesn't take more money or more time if you rehearse it carefully, and I've always done that."

The cinematography for the film was done by Frederick Gately. Music for the film, often a lugubrious rendition of "Hey Ho Anybody Home?", was supplied by Gerald Fried, who also scored *RETURN OF DRACULA*, and Stanley Kubrick's first three films. He is more noted, however, as a television composer, scoring *STAR TREK*,

THE MAN FROM UNCLE, *LOST IN SPACE* and others.

Another important contributor was Jack Pierce, the old Universal makeup whiz who had created the makeups for the *Wolf Man* and the *Frankenstein's Monster*, who had been let go by the studio and was filling in on low-budget productions.

"[He's] fantastic," said Band. "He was a very, very funny little guy, too. He had a great sense of humor."

One of the shortcuts that low-budget productions take is that "very often on those short schedules, you have to cut with the camera," explained Band. "You can't afford to complete coverage because you have to go faster."

Of the films that he has directed, *I BURY THE LIVING* remains Band's favorite. His next project was a borderline horror, based on Stephen Crane's story "The Monster," also scripted by Lou Garfinkle. "I managed to get half the money from Allied Artists and the other half I got from Sweden and shot it there," recalled Band. "I was there six months. That was *FACE OF FIRE*."

time that this was going to last, and there was a certain formula that to a degree worked, and you sat there thinking, well gosh, if I can distribute and have a theatrical distribution organization and a foreign organization and I can get some TV business and have some sales, and all of a sudden the overhead became overwhelming.

"Any hiccup, which happens for sure in this business all the time, sent the whole plan out the window, and whereas the majors have tremendous assets and a library [of films] and can go to the bank and could have three terrible years and keep rolling, an independent doesn't have that same power. If you're going to be independent, you have to be very frugal and very careful and not think that you have the ability to become a major overnight, or at least a mini-major."

When cash ran short, Band himself escaped just in time by selling Empire to Epic (a company controlled by Credit Lyonnaise, a foreign consortium noted for funding film productions) in 1988, allowing Band to form his current Full Moon enterprise where he put his experience and expertise to work making direct-to-video productions and staying out of distribution entirely. The company was launched with the successful *PUPPETMASTER* series in

TRANCERS' star Tim Thomerson as *DOLLMAN* (1990), outer space cop Brick Bardo, who is only 13" tall.



of their short-lived film careers. A minor triumph over financial adversity.

"I have nothing bad to say about Kincaid or Bechard," said Band. "Bechard may have thought his films were among the best of the '80s, and I may have seen them as virtually unreleaseable. But there were already presales based on the titles and poster art. The best of world's would have been to have not released those films. The worst would be to be obligated to release them. That's the position Empire was in."

DOLLS ★★★

Directed by Stuart Gordon. 1987. 77 mins. Starring: Ian Patrick Williams, Guy Rolfe, Carrie Lorraine.

This is a largely unheralded gem for both Band and director Gordon, a relatively restrained exercise in mood and atmosphere that failed to satisfy the fans of Gordon's more maniacal efforts. Filmed before *FROM BEYOND*, but released after it, this makes a nice counterpoint to that film's wretched excesses.

Basically it's a dark children's fantasy about a house where children's toys come to life to even the score for a neglected and abused child. David Allen's effects are typically fine and they undoubtedly provided much of the inspiration for Band's later *PUPPETMASTER* series. Guy Rolfe, here playing the warlock responsible for the magical animation of the toys, would later play Toulon, the puppetmaster himself.



GHOULIES II staged the ad art that made the original a hit, but proved just as lame. Band's first sequel.

GHOULIES II ★

Directed by Albert Band. 1987. 89 mins. Starring: Damon Martin, Royal Dano, Phil Fondacaro.

Today, Band's name is virtually synonymous with sequels, but this was his first. With the original *GHOULIES* having been Empire's most successful film, a sequel was probably unavoidable. What might have been avoidable is having it be as lame as the first one. The carnival setting, and Band Sr.'s eye for atmospheric visuals, elevate this a little over its predecessor, but Buechler's title beasts are still unconvincing in look and movement. Even worse is the full grown Ghoulie at the film's climax. It's a particularly stiff-looking man-in-a-suit monster that only manages to make the main creatures look good in comparison.

PRISON ★★★

Directed by Renny Harlin. 1988. 102 mins. Starring: Lane Smith, Chelsea Field, Lincoln Kilpatrick.

In an attempt to bolster his already faltering Empire, Band went into partnership with *HALLOWEEN*

The film, a parable on prejudice which starred Cameron Mitchell and James Whitmore, was about a man whose face is disfigured in a fire after saving a young boy and becomes an object of fear and hatred in his neighborhood. "In the trades, they said if Edgar Allan Poe had a camera, he would have done what I did," said Band. It was after directing in Sweden that Band decided to move his family first to Paris and then Rome.

Band worked mostly on epics and westerns while in Italy, but he did manage to produce one infamous fantasy project. "I produced and directed a Hercules television pilot for Joe Levine called *HERCULES AND THE PRINCESS OF TROY*," he said, "which in itself was a tremendous challenge, not only because I had to shoot it in Yugoslavia and in Italy, but also in the water. I remember the big monster in that shoot kept deflating and sinking. I remember that as the most frustrating project that I've ever been involved with. It wasn't meant to be released theatrically, it was meant to be a pilot for a TV series, and they did play the pilot but it never went to series."

Years later Band directed a flea-bitten mutt of a horror film called *DRACULA'S DOG* (1978). "It died here," he said, "but it did wonderful business in England where it was called *HOUNDS OF DRACULA*. Insane title. Part of the challenge was the dog, to get it to wear phony fangs. We had five *Dobermans*, one for closeups, one for running, one for obeying, lying down. The vampire fangs would last for about 60 seconds. [It starred] Jose Ferrer. He was great. He spoke so many languages. He spoke French, Italian. Lots of fun. Wonderful actor. It was shot in Griffith Park."

These days, Band is an important cog in the development wheel at Full Moon, where one

“I’m involved on almost every picture at Full Moon, in the development of the scripts, production and post-production.”

—Director Albert Band—



Jeffrey Combs as DR. MORDRID (1990), inspired by Marvel Comics' Dr. Strange, co-directed by Charles and Albert Band. Below: Albert Band directs Austin O'Brien in *PREHYSTERIA* (1993).



of his pet projects is producing a film he read about in *Cinefantastique*, *THE PRIMEVALS*. "I'm involved with at least 12 pictures a year here, if not more," said Band, who is also busy developing his own projects, and plans to produce films independently using Full Moon's facility.

In order to direct a film, Band claims he has to love it. A few films, he's co-credited with his son. Band explained how the collaboration worked: "We didn't co-direct *DR. MORDRID*," he said. "We directed it in parts. I took a number of days and he took a number of days. It wasn't like we were both on the set at the same time. We have the same vision for the picture,

long discussions, lots of rehearsals together, and then he went on and did his schtick, and I would shoot, depending on his availability. We were going to do that with *ROBOT WARS*, but it turned out that he couldn't afford the time, so I did *ROBOT WARS* [solo].

"It was the time allowed. He would say to me, I've got a meeting on Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday, so I can shoot Friday. Whatever the schedule called for, he would shoot. It wasn't I want to shoot this scene. The reason we co-directed was that it was more efficient, and because there was a special fondness for that particular project that we both had. We thought it'd be fun."

Band noted that in addition to specific Full Moon assignments for which he is credited, he's involved in the development of most of Full Moon's films. "I'm involved in the development of the screenplays," he said. "I'm involved in the production itself. I'm certainly involved in the post-production. I'm involved on almost every picture they have."

Asked about working for a family-run business, the elder Band replied, "I love it, especially my son Richard, who is a great musician, a tremendous talent, who brings a lot of quality to the movies he scores for us. As a kid, he started with a guitar and never stopped. At music school in Rome, he was beginning to compose for himself."

Band thinks that patience, luck, and love for the material are the most important qualities a director must have. "I'd say *I BURY THE LIVING* is probably my favorite picture," he said, "even though it was made so many years ago. I think it still has something to say today and I've been actively trying to find a way to remake it—probably get a star. I think today it would be even better."

In horror, the dead never stay dead. □



Sprug, the flying disembodied head from the planet Arcturos in *DOLLMAN* (1990), a prosthetic on wires designed by Bill Sturgeon. For dialogue scenes, the flying rig was placed around actor Frank Collison (inset). Why does Sturgeon give Full Moon state-of-the-art effects for a fraction of what he'd charge a major production—for the creative fun of it all.

1989. Band also resolved not to buy any outside material.

By the end of *Empire*, Band found himself spending all his time traveling around and talking to banks, not doing what he wanted to do, so he took his opportunity to get out, retaining the sequel rights to *TRANCERS* and the rights to some unmade projects.

"What I decided to do, having learned a lot, was start a label that, number one would have no distribution apparatus but be a filmmaking and marketing label," said Band. Full Moon continues to engage in foreign distribution, which mostly entails using agents to go to the film markets and sell to various countries' regional distributors. "I didn't want to be

in video distribution and I didn't want to be in theatrical distribution.

"My belief in 1988 was that if one made a quality genre film, since the theatrical market was gone, except for the big epics, you could take a picture out with no shame and release it, premiere it on home video and do good business, and then sell all the other ancillary rights to HBO and Showtime and pay-per-view, and I could still continue to sell foreign. That was the premise of Full Moon."

Full Moon projects are all self-financed. Said Band, "We're not involved with any partners, any banks. We started with one picture, then two, then four and we just built it up. We've got very good relation-

ships with our distributors, Paramount. I vowed after the *Empire* experience never to be involved with banks or partners."

For Full Moon, Band said his philosophy was "No public, no partners, no bank loans, no debt. Total control. This is not an easy business, you've got to watch it every single day. Definitely doing it independent[ly]. If you're going to make mistakes or have a situation that isn't working out well, it's better that it's your thing.

"The worst experience is to be doing something that isn't working and it wasn't even your idea. The minute that happens and you fail, then what's the point? The way I look at it, I've done this for 22 years and it took 17 years of making a million mistakes to figure out hopefully—how to do it right, the net result of a lot of real difficult work. All the pictures I've made have all made money for someone—it's not like I've made pictures that have been unsuccessful."

Band's first stop was Paramount, to whom he presented the basic premise of Full Moon, promising only to release genre product that he made and selling his association with genre

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producer Irwin Yablans.

"[Yablans] came up with the idea and was very involved in the actual production," said screenwriter C. Courtney Joyner. "What Charlie did was recognize its possibilities and get it out there for people to see."

After an inauspicious debut with the Finnish action film *BORN AMERICAN*, director Renny Harlin caught Hollywood's attention with this film. He would move from this \$4 million production to the \$80 million *DIE HARD II* in a scant two years. With most of his work since characterized by excess and remarkably stupid scripts, this crisp and efficient horror film may remain his finest achievement. Ignoring, of course, marrying Geena Davis.

The film benefited from Joyner's strong script. The writer later directed *TRANCERS III* and the recent *LURKING FEAR* for Band.



Band teamed-up with Irwin Yablans to produce *PRISON*, the U.S. directing debut of Renny Harlin.

TRANSFORMATIONS NO ★

Directed by Jay Kamen. 1988. 84 mins. Starring: Rex Smith, Patrick MacNee, Lisa Langlois, Christopher Neame.

Outside of the amateur efforts of Bechard and Kincaid, this may be the worst film to come out of *Empire*. The film offers one-time *PIRATES OF PENZANCE* star, and current infomercial pitchman, Rex Smith, as an astronaut who contracts some sort of space athlete's foot and slowly turns into a has-been actor. Sorry, I meant a hideous monster.

"I was given two weeks to write

Guard Hal Landon Jr., strangled by animated barbed wire, an effect for *PRISON* by John Carl Buechler.



Pamela Gordon as "Mummy," Denice Duff as Michelle and Anders Hove as vampire Radu in *SUBSPECIES III* (1994), the cap of Full Moon's best series.



a script that could be shot in 10 days for way under a million dollars, on the left-over ROBOT JOX sets in Rome," said Mitch Brian. "I did it, they shot it. I don't put it on my resume, but I can't deny that it was the start of my career. If you're looking for someone to bad-mouth Charlie, you won't get it from me."

Similarities to THE FLY are certainly not coincidental, but one suspects that screenwriter Brian was actually aiming for some type of AIDS allegory, since the disease is sexually transmitted. Much of Brian's dialogue is solid and his characters, particularly MacNee's galactic monk, are interesting. A threadbare production and lifeless direction undermine his good intentions. There is ample nudity, stock spaceship footage, and some grisly, but unconvincing, effects, as well as an unusually strong cast, but all for naught.

PULSEPOUNDERS

Directed by Charles Band. 1988. Starring: Tim Thomerson, Jeffrey Combs, Barbara Crampton.

When Band's operation had to be sold due to a cash crunch, several films were uncompleted. All the unreleased titles were bought by Edward Sarlui's Transworld Entertainment and most were finished and released under the Epic name. This is the sole exception.

"PULSEPOUNDERS is completely shot, it just needs post-production," said Band. "I still hope to get it out of the mess it's tangled up in and release it. David Gale is terrific in it, and with him gone now, it's all the more reason to get it out where people can see him one last time."

Conceived as a sequel anthology, the film offers a TRANCERS sequel, written by creators Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo, a new Lovecraft adaptation, featuring RE-ANIMATOR alumni Jeffrey Combs and Barbara Crampton and a totally unnecessary followup to the dreadful DUNGEONMASTER. Never one to waste anything, Band has recently announced a new series of hard-edged horror thrillers to be released by Full Moon under the "Pulsepounders" name.



The presales ad for Band's ambitious trilogy, filmed but not released after Empire's collapse.

GHOST TOWN ★★★

Directed by Richard Governor. 1988. 85 mins. Starring: Jimmie F. Skaggs, Franc Luz, Bruce Glover.

From CURSE OF THE UNDEAD to HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER, there probably haven't been more than a dozen entries in the horror/western sub-genre. Amazingly, most of them are pretty good. So is GHOST TOWN.

FULL MOON PREVIEW

CASTLE FREAK

Band teams up with director Stuart Gordon for a no-holds-barred shocker.

By Dennis Fischer

Director Stuart Gordon's previous films in collaboration with Charlie Band, RE-ANIMATOR, FROM BEYOND, THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM, are the ones most beloved by horror fans, who should rejoice that his latest feature, CASTLE FREAK, is a hell for leather assault on audience sensibilities.

CASTLE FREAK is the story of an American family that inherits a castle in Italy and discovers that somebody has been left behind in one of the dungeons. The wretch has been very, very seriously tortured and maimed, arousing the family's pity. However, the family finds itself pulled apart at the seams when the "freak" gets free and becomes obsessed with their teenaged daughter.

"It's really a return to an old-fashioned horror movie," commented Gordon. "Our goal was to really make a scary film. One of the things Charlie Band and I talked about a lot was how long it had been since either one of us had seen a movie that scared us. I sometimes think that RE-ANIMATOR was one of the reasons that people are now doing sort of comic horror films, but I miss movies that really are scary."

RE-ANIMATOR excelled at combining humor with gut-wrenching horror, giving the film genuine visceral impact. "That's one of the things that RE-ANIMATOR imitators for-



Frequent Gordon star Barbara Crampton and Jessica Dollarhide in a monster tale designed to be released without an encumbering rating.

got, which is you have to do both," continued Gordon. "One of the things I always found was that comedy works well with horror, but you have to really build tension for it to work. With CASTLE FREAK, there is some comedy in the movie, but it's more of a real hide-under-your-chair kind of movie."

Part of what drew Gordon to the project was Band's agreement to release the film unrated, long thought to be a risky move in these censorious times. According to Gordon, that "basically gave me the license to go crazy and do whatever I wanted to do. So we pushed and stretched the envelope even further."

Gordon predicted it will be a very disturbing film to a lot of

people. The movie reunites RE-ANIMATOR stars Jeffrey Coombs and Barbara Crampton. Jonathan Fuller, who played the leading man in PIT AND THE PENDULUM, plays the freak himself.

Fuller is singled out by Gordon for high praise: "He was in makeup six hours a day for this role. Jonathan is an incredible physical actor. I first worked with him on stage in Chicago, where we did a production in which he had to learn gymnastics to play the part, which he did incredibly well."

"So when I knew I was going to be doing this movie, I went to him because I knew this was going to be an incredibly demanding part, physically.

This is a guy who has been twisted, every bone in whose body has been broken and healed badly. It was clear to me that this wouldn't just be a stunt man walking around wearing a hockey mask.

"Also, the character has a great deal of sadness about him at times, like the great monsters [such as] Karloff's Frankenstein. There's a pathos there as well as horror. I realized we really needed a wonderful actor to play the freak, and it turned out that one of Jonathan's great heroes of all time was Lon Chaney, so the idea of being able to tackle a Lon Chaney role, even with the rigors of that makeup, would have driven anybody else crazy."

The elaborate makeup for the film was executed by Optic



Dollarhide encounters the titular creature, makeup by Optic Nerve, in a story about an American family that inherits a castle in Italy and discovers that somebody has been left behind in the dungeons, tortured and maimed.

Nerve. Added Gordon, "Jonathan, when I cast him in the part, read the script and called me up and said, 'Thank you for thinking about me,' and I said, 'If you can say that at the end, I'll accept it. I'll accept the thanks.' The last day he came over to me and said thanks. He's a real gentleman."

According to Gordon, it was a difficult shoot on a short four-week schedule. The film was lensed in the same 15th-century castle where Gordon had shot *PIT AND THE PENDULUM* for *Full Moon*. "It's not a sound stage," commented the director. "Physically, the demands of the production shooting in a castle like that were difficult. It was very de-

manding physically on all of the actors, because they all have to go through a lot.

"We shot the film in a very short amount of time. The whole shooting schedule was four weeks, which was about the shortest shooting schedule I've ever had. I think *RE-ANIMATOR* was about the same schedule."

CASTLE FREAK was written by Dennis Paoli, Gordon's high school buddy and long-time writing partner who also wrote *PIT AND THE PENDULUM*, *FROM BEYOND* and collaborated on *RE-ANIMATOR*. "The project was quick and came together fast, but sometimes when that happens, it becomes very good," said Gordon. "Every-

thing just kind of fell into place. The script turned out as a tight little script, and a very scary one."

Due to the recent problems at *Full Moon*, the film remains in a kind of limbo as does the still unproduced *SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH*, a Lovecraft adaptation also scripted by Paoli after Paoli and Gordon's plans to make a voodoo project called *GRIS GRIS* fell through.

"We were unable to get [*SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH*] made because the budget on it was too high," said Band. "It didn't fit into your horror movie niche, it was a bigger project and it was so strange. What people kept saying to us was that if it was about vampires or werewolves, you would have no problem here, but since this is about people turning into fish, this is a little bit too weird for us to be able to put this kind of money into the project. Well, to me, that's what makes this interesting. You haven't seen this before."

Hope for *SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH* was revived when Charlie Band wanted to produce it. Said Gordon, "There have been so many false starts on that. There were a lot of people that needed to be dealt with and deals needed to be worked out, and turn-

Gordon (l) on the set, the same authentic 15th-century castle at which he shot *PIT AND THE PENDULUM* for *Full Moon*, filming on a four-week schedule.



The story finds a modern day lawman pursuing his girl through a supernatural sandstorm to the title location. This is a very literal "ghost town" where the bad guys are already dead, and none too happy about it. The whole thing starts to unravel about halfway and falls apart altogether before the climax, but the first half is imaginative and evocative enough to make viewing worthwhile.

WALDO WARREN: PRIVATE DICK WITHOUT A BRAIN aka MAXIMUM THRUST

Directed by Tim Kincaid. 1988. Starring: Rick Gianasa.

Hollywood Reporter's 1988 AFM issue listed screening times for this *Beyond Infinity* title from no-budget impresario Kincaid. While most of the finished films from this period at Empire spent some time in suspended animation before seeing release, this one seems to have gone *Beyond Infinity* and straight to oblivion. The story apparently had something to do with a bodyguard (Gianasa, also in Kincaid's *MUTANT HUNT*) who finds himself suddenly ineffective, when he falls in love with his client.

"Yeah, it was a finished film," recalled Band, "but I have no idea whatever happened to it."

FULL MOON RISES

PUPPETMASTER ★

Directed by David Schmoeller. 1989. 90 mins. Starring: Paul Le Mat, Jimmie F Scaggs, Barbara Crampton.

Band bounced back quickly from Empire's financial woes with a deal to produce a series of direct-to-video genre titles for Paramount. This was the first, and set the tone for most of *Full Moon's* subsequent releases: an intriguing idea, badly underdeveloped, a competent production, but rarely impressive or memorable and a potential thriller, bogged down by a languid pace that's apparently planned around fulfilling a promised running time, rather than audience expectations.

Band recognized the failings of

Full Moon's first release in 1989 proved a surprise hit on the video market and spawned five sequels.



some of the direct-to-video fodder at Empire, which failed to satisfy video store owners or their customers. Instead, he created an approach that almost always meets, and sometimes surpasses, the minimum expectations of the average viewer.

Though Empire failed financially, Band stressed the companies' considerable achievements. "Empire Entertainment is credited with having some of the most impressive video sales numbers ever," he said. "Numerous films became cult classics and are still gaining fans every day."



Band competes with himself, as Empire leftovers start to surface. Paul Satterfield in *ARENA*.

ARENA

★★

Directed by Peter Manoogian. 1989. 97 mins. Starring: Paul Satterfield, Claudia Christian, Hamilton Camp.

Empire product comes back to haunt Full Moon. This very loose adaptation of Frederick Brown's classic short story has no reason to work, but it does thanks to perfect casting, some great John Buechler alien creations and another Bilson and DeMeo script that cannily mixes genres. This time, '40s boxing movies and science fiction.

While Bilson and DeMeo were long gone by the time this script went before the camera, director Manoogian manages to deliver their comic book meldings slickly.

This tale of a young fighter entering an inter-galactic boxing match to help Earth regain its pride was hung up in the Empire-TWE transference and, ironically, ended up coming out on video in direct competition to Band's new Full Moon releases. It's empty-headed to be sure, but fun.

SHADOWZONE

★★

Directed by J.S. Cardone. 1989. 89 mins. Starring: James Hong, Shawn Weatherley, Louise Fletcher.

This above-average sci-fi

Louise Fletcher as Dr. Erhart in *SHADOWZONE* (1989), as NASA unleashes a shapeshifting horror.



around costs that had to be paid and all of this stuff, and he [Band] went through all of the legal tangle to make it happen.

"But now with the situation at Full Moon, it may have to be put off again, so I'm still keeping my fingers crossed that we're eventually going to get this movie made."

Gordon noted that his relationship with Band has been a good one. Their stars rose together with the success and notoriety of *RE-ANIMATOR*, which helped establish Empire as a potential force to be reckoned with. Despite Band's claims that *RE-ANIMATOR* was produced by Empire, however, Gordon asserts that *RE-ANIMATOR* was an independent production that Empire picked up for distribution. Said Gordon, "Brian [Yuzna] was the producer of *RE-ANIMATOR*, but he made a deal with Charlie to distribute it in exchange for Charlie providing postproduction facilities. That really was the way things worked out."

Despite *RE-ANIMATOR*'s financial success, very little of the money it generated made it back to Yuzna or his investors who were understandably upset. As a consequence, the investors threatened to sue him, and he in turn threatened to sue Empire and Charlie Band. Gordon had signed a three picture deal with Band, but his former producer declined to work with him again after the matter was settled out of court.

Gordon noted that he and Yuzna remain friends and are discussing doing more projects together. "As a matter of fact, Dennis Paoli and I just wrote a script together for Brian to direct for Trimark called *THE DENTIST*," said Gordon. "We've been talking about combining forces on other things including another *RE-ANIMATOR* sequel. Another is a project of seven films based

“It's really a return to the old-fashioned horror movie. Our goal was to make a really scary film like those we now miss.”

—Director Stuart Gordon—



Jeffrey Combs and Barbara Crampton star in *CASTLE FREAK*. Below: Gordon directs the film, scripted by long-time writing partner Dennis Paoli.



on the Seven Deadly Sins with seven different directors doing each of the sins. Brian is one of the organizers of this project, and he would be directing one and I would be directing one. So Brian and I are still very good friends and I've been very happy with the work he's been doing as a director. I think he's been doing some very exciting work."

Yuzna went on to direct *BRIDE OF RE-ANIMATOR* without Gordon's participation. Gordon gave this reaction to Yuzna's sequel: "I thought that he did things differently than I would have done them. I have kidded him about this, because one of my major questions about that was

how did Herbert West ever become a doctor? They keep referring to him as Dr. West in the sequel. I can't imagine a university giving this guy a diploma. But Brian has his own take on things, and it's a unique one.

"He also took the rest of the Lovecraft stories as a basis, which I thought was pretty good. We have been talking about a third one which I would possibly direct."

Gordon's *PIT AND THE PENDULUM* was initially a very ambitious project for Vestron with a budget of about \$6 million, and Peter O'Toole and Sherilyn Fenn set to star. When Vestron went under, the project would have gone down the tubes except for Band, who resurrected it on a budget of under \$2 million. Gordon is very pleased with the film, particularly with Lance Henriksen's performance.

Gordon noted that *CASTLE FREAK* has not been caught up in Full Moon's recent financial difficulties. "My movie is really in kind of a strange place because it really was not part of the deal with Paramount," said Gordon. "It was something that Charlie wanted to

do because he wanted to do it. So there is not a completion bond company involved in *CASTLE FREAK*. It was so small that it flew below the radar in a way.

"Paramount, I think, likes the film, and what they're saying is '[perhaps] we'll take this.' But all of this must now get sorted out, which is what Charlie is in the process of doing. My sense of this is that he will be back on his feet by the end of the year [1994], and that his new mission will be family films, although he may still do the Full Moon movies. Those other movies still do extremely well overseas and have done pretty well here too as direct-to-video product." □

filmmaking. The average budget for his productions was about \$1.5 million, a budget which rises for the Moonbeam films, due to the additional costs involved in using child actors, and theatrical films which may go as high as \$4-5 million.

Band's long-range plan was to release a picture a month, but initially he didn't expect to release more than one the first year. "The first picture we made was PUPPETMASTER, which did exceptional business," said Band. "There was some intrigue involved because at the time the consensus in video distribution in this country was that unless you released this picture theatrically in some way, even in only a few theaters, the video guys are not going to buy it. They're going to buy ten copies instead of a hundred because they're going to feel if it was made for video, it was junk."

"I said I didn't believe it. If you make a good picture that's got the right hook, that appeals to the genre fans, that's marketed well, you're not fooling the video retailer any more just because you're playing on one screen in downtown L.A."

In 1988, Band was the only person with a label who took this approach while others insisted that films had to be given a platformed theatrical release. While most direct-to-video titles shipped only 10,000 copies, Full Moon shipped 55,000 copies of PUPPETMASTER. For a direct-to-video title it was a huge hit. Full Moon slowly made more and more pictures, building up from an eight-person operation to a 200-person operation which has been extremely successful.

Band is intricately and intimately involved in all Full Moon productions, which all bear to some extent his personal imprint. "I come up with the ideas, the premise, the artwork, the title," said Band, "so I dream up the project for a potential series and I stay as close as I can to the development of the screenplay, the casting, and certainly the postproduction up to the final mix, and also very much involved in marketing, making sure that it is positioned

thriller may have been inspired by Band's Empire success with the stories of H.P. Lovecraft. This time its NASA experiments in long-term suspended animation that provide a dimensional gateway for a shape-shifting creature.

Nothing new, but it's well executed by a small and solid cast and director Cardone makes good use of the claustrophobic underground research facility setting and shows a little more directorial flash than most of Band's directors-for-hire.

CRASH AND BURN ★★

Directed by Charles Band. 1990. 85 mins. Starring: Paul Ganus, Ralph Waite, Megan Ward, Bill Moseley.

Waite portrays a futuristic environmental activist who is waging a war of words with a corrupt government. He, and a SHIP OF FOOLS assortment of people, are trapped by a sandstorm in his isolated communications center. The group includes a standard issue hero, an unknown assassin, a murderous cyborg, a couple of hookers and young girl (Ward) with a crush on the hero and the keys to a huge, derelict robot buried in the sand.

Band manages a properly sweaty and claustrophobic feel to the setting and generates some honest suspense and excitement. However, it all collapses in an ending with one too many twists and a casual disregard for ground-rules established earlier.

Trivia note: Yes, that's the same Bill Moseley from TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE, here totally unrecognizable as a handsome and likeable member of the group.



Pinhead strangles Collin Bernsen in PUPPETMASTER II, feature directing debut of David Allen.

CATACOMBS aka CURSE IV: THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE ★★

Directed by David Schmoeller. 1990. 112 mins. Starring: Timothy Van Patten, Ian Abercrombie.

Another Empire product that got re-released and re-titled in 1993 as part of the unrelated series of CURSE films.

Despite a somewhat hackneyed story, an ancient evil buried in the title location beneath a remote monastery, and the utterly insane casting of Timothy Van Patten as a monk, this is a pretty good little film. Emphasis is on mood instead of gore and there is an honest attempt to develop the characters before they become victims of the revived terror.

Director Schmoeller makes good use of his European locales and piles the atmospheric visuals on thick to make a film that could almost pass for genuine Italian semi-classic from the heyday of Mario Bava.



Sherilyn Fenn starred in one of Band's best directorial efforts, with a werewolf by Greg Cannom.

MERIDIAN aka KISS OF THE BEAST ★★

Directed by Charles Band. 1990. 90 mins. Starring: Sherilyn Fenn, Malcom Jamieson, Phil Fondacaro, Hilary Mason, Alex Daniels.

This atmospheric, erotic and sometimes lyrical tale shows a markedly different side of Band as director. The story is too hackneyed for its stylistic flourishes to elevate very far, but it tries, and at times exceeds these limitations. This story is pretty similar to Band's THE ALCHEMIST, offering a cursed nobleman who lives through the centuries as a beast, only to be freed by the love of a woman. Sort of a "Beauty And Her Breasts." There's an uncomfortable implication of the benefits of rape in the courting process and the ending's a bit too pat, but the European locations are well utilized, Greg Cannom's werewolf makeup is effective and the erotically supercharged Fenn, will all manage to keep your interest.

"Among my favorites," said Band, "I always love to work in Europe, and Sherilyn [Fenn] is a real talent. If people see a reflection of my father in its style, I'm flattered. He is still involved in every project underway today. I am his son. His influence on me is everywhere."

PUPPETMASTER II ★★

Directed by David Allen. 1990. 90 mins. Starring: Steve Welles, Elizabeth MacLellan, Collin Bernsen.

The success of the first PUPPETMASTER prompted a quick followup that is actually an improvement. Part of its strength comes from actually making the puppetmaster, Andre Toulon, a presence.

Band's avowed love for the Universal horror films of the '30s is obvious here as Toulon spends most of the film swathed in bandages, a dead ringer for THE INVISIBLE MAN. David DeCoteau returns to the Band fold with an effective job as producer. David Allen, whose animation and rod puppets provide life for the puppets, makes an acceptable directorial debut in a solid example of effective low-budget filmmaking.

"I tried to give it a whole different flavor than the first one," said Allen. "Instead of a bunch of paranormal mystics, who are like a bunch of airheads, they are real people who are more scientifically based. To me, the interesting thing to try to get, at least for a few moments in the picture, was what would real scientists confronted with this situation behave like? But that became difficult because it requires a level of performance that most of the people at Full Moon—they audition for their own reasons—aren't really quite capable of."

DOLLMAN ★

Directed by Albert Pyun. 1990. 86 mins. Starring: Tim Thomerson, Jackie Earl Haley, Kamala Lopez.

Most of the films made by Full Moon spring from ideas fermented in the fertile imagination of Charles Band. Just as Bert I. Gordon built a career out of making things larger than normal, it's also undeniable that Band has a strange fascination with things smaller than a breadbox. From GHOULIES to PUPPETMASTER to the upcoming TEENIE-WEENIES Band is drawn to things smaller than life. "Charlie's an amazingly, imaginative guy," said Paul DeMeo, who wrote some of Band's first films. "Most of the ideas for Empire's better films were initially his, and I understand that's still the case at Full Moon."

But the results of this personal obsession have been decidedly mixed. Case in point: DOLLMAN, which offers an outer space cop, one Brick Bardo, who chases a villain to Earth, only to discover that they are only 13" tall in our world. This could be a great concept for the kind of comic book lunacy that Bilson and DeMeo did so well with Band, but director Albert Pyun has a different idea, setting it all in a rather believably rendered South Bronx which doesn't gel with a 13-inch cop and his arch-enemy, a head riding on a space-Frisbee.



Gordon with a stop-motion model from ROBOT JOX, Band's Empire epic that took years to finish.

ROBOT JOX ★★

Directed by Stuart Gordon. 1990. 96 mins. Starring: Gary Graham, Anne-Marie Johnson, Paul Kolso.

The most prestigious of the Empire leftovers, a futuristic comic book tale of Giant Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots that could have saved the company. Made at the height of the "Transformer" toy craze, and obviously inspired by Japan's internationally popular, ROBOTECH animated films, the modestly budgeted film seemed a certain moneymaker. Today, with

MOONBEAM PREVIEW

MAGIC ISLAND

Band's family formula raids fantasy film classics.

By Dennis Fischer

MAGIC ISLAND is an example of the kind of film that Moonbeam plans to specialize in. Directed by Sam Irvin (GUILTY AS CHARGED and Full Moon's OBLIVION), it incorporates elements from many different classic family fantasy films. As Irvin related, "It has pieces of PETER PAN, LITTLE MERMAID, MYSTERIOUS ISLAND, TREASURE ISLAND and SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON, a fun mixture of different things which I thought I could have a lot of fun doing.

"I had always wanted to do a pirate movie," said Irvin in explaining the appeal the project had for him. "It had a lot of special effects, a facet of filmmaking I wanted to continue learning and doing more of. It has some stop-motion animation and some live-action special effects puppetry."

The script is by Brent Friedman (THE RESURRECTED, NECRONOMICON), a frequent Full Moon script doctor and writer, who took over the script from the original writers

A sandshark, effects provided by Full Moon's in-house makeup team headed by expert Mark Rappaport.



Adolescent Splash: Zachary Ty Bryan as Zach and Jessie-Ann Friend as Lily, a boy transported by the book of the title to cross swords with Blackbeard.

and worked with Irvin. The project became a favorite of Full Moon exec Debra Dion, who also had input into it.

"I said at the beginning that I didn't know quite what to expect in terms of Moonbeam Films," said Irvin, "My films tend to have the kind of elements that might not lend themselves to a family film. I didn't want to lose my edge and make a film that was homogenized into a [Disney-type film]."

Irvin believes that family films should not talk to their audience but rather aim to please adults in the manner of Jay Ward and Bill Scott's BULLWINKLE series or the classic Warner Bros cartoons, which are popular with children but retain an adult sensibility.

"One thing I made really clear early on," said Irvin, "that if I was going to do a family film, it still had to retain an edge to it. And the elements that I thought really lent themselves to that were Blackbeard and his pirates. I thought that we could really have a lot of fun with

them and make them quite outrageous.

"I had the idea of casting Andrew Divoff, who played Red-eye in OBLIVION, as Blackbeard because he has such a wonderful menace about him and at the same time brings a tremendous amount of humor to his villains. They thought it was a terrific idea, so he was one of the first people that we contacted about playing in the film.

"[He] just does a magnificent job as Blackbeard; he is absolutely hysterical and I allowed him to bring a lot of improvisational stuff and add a lot of lines. Once he got going, it inspired the other pirates who were with him to develop their material a lot and we just had enormous fun bringing that whole team of villains together and bringing them life."

Zachery Ty Bryan, star of HOME IMPROVEMENT, plays the lead in MAGIC ISLAND, a young boy named Jack who feels ignored by his hardworking single mom. To

cheer him up, his Caribbean housekeeper (Ja'net Dubois) gives him a book which transports him to a Magic Island where he meets a mermaid, played by 12-year-old Jessie-Ann Friend and is pursued by pirates who believe that he can lead them to treasure.

Along the way, the characters run into various creatures and obstacles. Jack must use his resourcefulness and those 20th-century gadgets that he brought along with him to keep out of harm's way and set up booby traps (*a la* SHIPWRECKED) for the evil pursuing pirates.

When they finally do make it to Carbasas' tomb, there's a big stone guardian statue outside the entranceway that comes to life via stop-motion animation and threatens them before they manage to get inside. "That's going to be a really fun, Harryhausen-esque sequence," said Irvin. "It's going to be done by David Allen's department. It looks like we'll be using pretty much the same animators we did on OBLIVION who did the giant scorpions. Joe Grossberg is our special effects coordinator. He worked for Dave Allen in the same way on OBLIVION, came along with us and shot all of the plates and all of the live-action stuff that will be incorporated with it, and also helped out with a lot of second unit photography."

One of the live-action creatures is a sandshark built by Mark Rappaport's Creature FX shop. In the film, Jack has cravings for pizza, and spies a pizza tree he goes running for in an oasis of sand, and out of the sand comes a sandshark who threatens him for a brief time.

"That's all done with live-action puppetry and hydraulics,"





Captain Andrew Divoff and (l to r) Abraham Benrubi, Sean O'Kane and French Stewart bury Oscar Dillon, Edward Kerr and Lee Armstrong pirate style.

said Irvin. "The internal mechanism for the sandshark itself is the same internal mechanism they used for DRAGON-WORLD, so we're recycling as much stuff as we can to save costs, but it's really quite an extraordinary piece of machinery. It's got a lot of articulation. It took about eight people to work all the different mechanisms on it.

"This was quite an elaborate thing. It took a lot of people to maneuver and it was digging out trenches ala TREMORS... The big head of it was probably three or four feet long and maybe a foot and a half in diameter. There's a halfsize version that we're still completing—we always intended to do some pickup shots here, especially the shots of the shark emerging out of the sand and going back under the sand. It would have been almost impossible with the full-sized thing."

Another off-the-wall creature in the film is a three-headed wooden Tiki god. The three heads come to life and argue with each other. (Voices are supplied by Martine Beswick, Terry Sweeney, and long-time Irvin stalwart Isaac Hayes). There's a kind of a skeleton ghost who appears briefly in the film, and Irvin himself makes a cameo appearance as Carbasas.

MAGIC ISLAND, which Moonbeam made in partnership with Millenia Films, a Mexican film company, was shot in Ixtapa/Zihuatenejo, Mexico, which served as the location for the

various beaches and jungles in the film. Irvin described the area as a beautiful but growing tourist spot, three hours from Acapulco, though not nearly as built up.

MAGIC ISLAND evinces many different influences. One of the strongest of these, according to Irvin, are the zesty THREE and FOUR MUSKETEERS comedies directed by Richard Lester, who choreographed elaborate fight scenes for fun, excitement and humor. The plot carries echoes of THE NEVERENDING STORY and TIME BANDITS. The Blackbeard character is intentionally garbed to remind one of Captain Hook from Disney's PETER PAN, and Irvin plans to use clips from the Douglas Fairbanks version of THE BLACK PIRATE to set up Jack's interest in pirates at the beginning of the film. Additionally, a pair of slapstick pirates are buffoons in the traditional Laurel and Hardy manner.

"It's really got a lot of subtexts and a lot of important things to say under all the silliness and fun. I think there will be characters that people really do care about. There's a love story between [him] and the mermaid that's really touching.

It's sort of a modern WIZARD OF OZ," said Irvin. "The kid goes through the whole arc of growing up and figuring out his home life isn't as bad as he thought, yet learning that he's growing up and able to take charge of his own destiny." □

right."

Band then gives the premise to writers who will write his type of film. He refuses to consider outside submissions, which results in a certain consistency of quality in Full Moon productions. He feels that independents aren't likely to be offered first-rate projects in the first place and he doesn't want to hire people to go through thousands of submissions looking for something which might be suitable.

"We get plenty of films offered to us," said Band. "Every week someone says, 'Please, here's a horror film, a slasher film, a genre film, something that would be perfect for a Full Moon title,' and we don't even look at it. It's not because we're bad guys. We say, 'Listen, our plan is to release our own stuff. We've learned from the past.' And that doesn't mean one or two of those pictures weren't pretty good and certainly would have worked, but that wasn't the idea."

Full Moon decided to diversify and establish sister labels which would also be known for a consistent quality. Explained Dion, "Moonbeam opens up a whole new door that I was just dying to get into, and that's family entertainment. I've had the most fun with Moonbeam."

Moonbeam is a new subsidiary label designed to promote "family" style genre pictures, the models for which Band takes to be JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS, SEVENTH VOYAGE OF SINBAD, THE NEVERENDING STORY and HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS. The first Moonbeam title in 1993, PREHYSTERIA, shipped 70,000 units, cashing in on the dinosaur craze created by the success of JURASSIC PARK. Future Moonbeam titles include PET SHOP, about alien pets that come to Earth and are adopted, THE TEENY-WEENIES, now called THE WEE FOLK, BEANSTALK, MAGIC ISLAND, and the JOSH KIRBY...TIME WARRIOR series.

Band explained the impetus behind the move to launch Moonbeam: "The idea was to make a fantasy film that the

those perks past and its Common Market vs. Soviet bloc storyline sadly out of date, it remains solid, undemanding fun. Exactly what Band and director Gordon had in mind in the first place. David Allen's effects, a combination of animation and rod controlled puppets, are wonderful, and the film manages a futuristic feel, even though it lacks the budget for the proper sets and effects to visualize it. "At one point they had to shut down production and pull [David] Allen and his crew out of the desert until the cash flow improved," said Gordon.

Of all the titles that Band lost control of when Empire fell, ROBOT JOX was undoubtedly the most painful for Band personally. Budgeted at \$10 million it remains his largest production to date, and one that seemed an almost certain moneymaker when originally produced in 1988. By the time it finally saw some test screenings in '91, its time had passed. However, it still went on to considerable video success and plays almost constantly on cable TV.

DEMONIC TOYS NO ★

Directed by Peter Manoogian. 1990. 84 mins.
Starring: Tracy Scoggins, Bentley Mitchum, Michael Russo.

Band's tiny terrors obsession is trotted out once again in this lifeless thriller about demonically possessed toys. A tough street cop, inexplicably played by the glamorous Scoggins, finds herself trapped in a toy warehouse where a demon has animated several of the toys so that it can be reborn into the body of a young girl who is hiding in the warehouse. John Buechler's effects are a little less unconvincing than usual, since they represent creatures that are supposed to be made of fake fur and plastic anyway.



Michael Bendetti encounters bayou black magic in NETHERWORLD, a gem turned fast forward fodder.

NETHERWORLD ★

Directed by David Schmoeller. 1990. 90 mins.
Starring: Michael Bendetti, Denise Gentile.

After a slam-bang opening, filled with great imagery, this tale of black magic in the bayous meanders aimlessly until it comes to an all too obvious end. As he has done before for Band, Schmoeller delivers a film of considerable mood and atmosphere and for the first 15 minutes NETHERWORLD looks like it could be a minor gem. From that point on the film takes forever to tell a story that we can see coming a mile away.

Heavily promoted on Band's Full Moon record label because of the participation of a member of then

popular Bon Jovi, but the music is generally as uninspired as the film.

THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM ★★★

Directed by Stuart Gordon. 1991. 97 mins. Starring: Lance Henriksen, Rona De Ricci, Jeffrey Combs, Oliver Reed.

This was originally planned to be Band's return to larger budgets. The \$10 million, medieval period story, was slated to star Peter O'Toole and, the incongruously urban, Billy Dee Williams. While budgetary setbacks, and scheduling problems with O'Toole, scaled the production back considerably Band and Gordon still managed to deliver a quality production enlivened by some fine performances by its leads.

Henriksen gives his usual commanding performance as the inquisitor, Torquemada. That he achieves the character's expected villainy and madness is no surprise, but it's the unexpected shadings of his tortured soul that propel the film. Nearly as good is Rona De Ricci, a genuine beauty with the talent and looks to become a star. Gordon's characteristic dark humor is represented by Combs, Reed and Tom Towles, though their moments seem at odds with the rest of the film. It falls short of being the classic one might have expected from the pairing of Gordon and Edgar Allan Poe, but the strong performances and the seemingly lavish production, done on a shoestring, make it more than capable of standing beside Roger Corman's highly respected 1961 version.

"When I tell people what we do here they say 'Oh, like Roger Corman,'" said Full Moon publicist Kat Scudder. "That bothers me because so much of what he does these days is awful. We're much closer to the Corman of the '60s. We're trying to make quality, low-budget films, and there aren't too many others trying anymore."

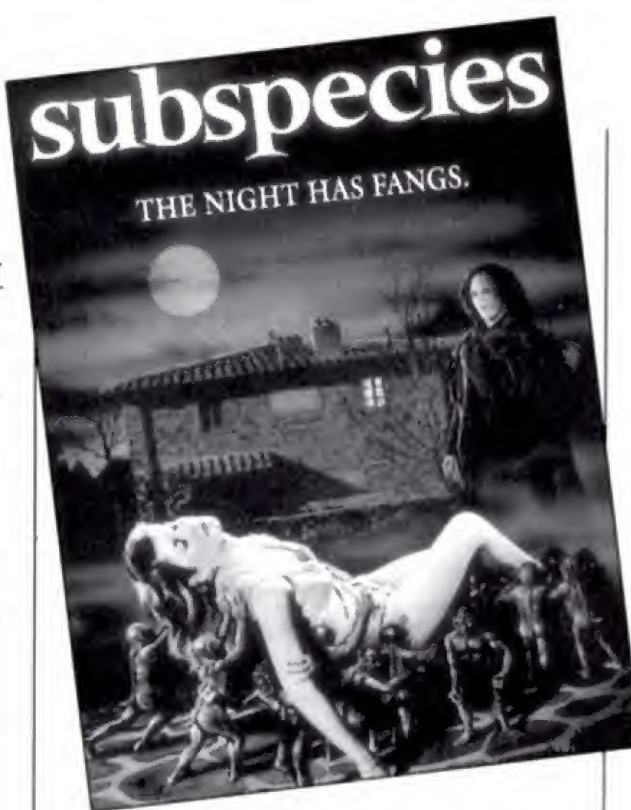


Tim Thomerson as Jack Deth in *TRANCERS II*, a series Band continued from his Empire days.

TRANCERS II: THE RETURN OF JACK DETH ★

Directed by Charles Band. 1990. 87 mins. Starring: Tim Thomerson, Helen Hunt, Megan Ward, Martine Beswick, Jeffrey Combs, Richard Lynch, Barbara Crampton, Art LaFleur.

This is actually the second sequel to the fine Band/Bilson/DeMeo film from Empire days. The first being the still unseen Jack Deth segment of the uncompleted PULSE-POUNDERS. Those who pined in vain for that seemingly lost film had high expectations for this Full Moon follow-up, which reunited Band with all the key original cast



Monsters, gore and sex, plus the fine visual sense of director Ted Nicolaou kick off a neat trilogy.

members and a host of other B-movie luminaries. Unfortunately we were doomed to disappointment. Much of the film is based around fallen baseball star Hap Ashby, a minor, and irritating character in the original. The action scenes are widely spaced and clumsily staged and the pacing of the film gives new meaning to the word lethargy. The only thing that maintains viewer interest is that everyone in the film seems to be having a great time.

One suspects that this was an enjoyable, extended-family reunion for all involved. This feeling is strengthened by cameos from Band's father, mother and mother-in-law, and the fathers of stars Thomerson and Hunt. I don't fault anybody for having fun on the job, but I think the viewer's pleasure needs to be kept at the forefront, an approach that has been one of Full Moon's strengths. Here forgotten.

PUPPETMASTER III ★★★

Directed by David DeCoteau. 1990. 86 mins. Starring: Guy Rolfe, Richard Lynch, Sarah Douglas, Walter Gotell.

Against all odds PUPPETMASTER III continues the improvement started by #2. While ostensibly a prequel to the first two, the whole concept of the films seems to have been rethought. Toulon becomes a tragic and somewhat heroic figure. Rather than insane puppet creator, he is a benevolent father-figure. The story takes place during WWII and finds Toulon persecuted for ridiculing Hitler in puppet plays. His puppets, whose bodies house the life forces of friends murdered by the Nazis, manage to save him, but the Nazis now know of the formula that gives them life and that it could do the same for a dead soldier.

DeCoteau again demonstrates his amazing ability to deliver the goods with a small budget. While the backlot German locations are sometimes familiar, they are well utilized. The film is very well cast and David Allen's effects, the whole reason the series exists, are better presented than in prior, or subsequent entries. From early

Empire no-budgeters to the latest Full Moon offshoot (the erotic oriented Torchlight) Band has relied on DeCoteau to achieve competency on budgets that nearly qualify for welfare assistance. This film seems to imply that its time to give him a decent budget and see what he can achieve.

SUBSPECIES ★★

Directed by Ted Nicolaou. 1990. 90 mins. Starring: Michael Watson, Laura Tate, Angus Scrimm, Anders Hove.

The SUBSPECIES series (three to date) has been one of Band's most successful thanks to the tried and true formula of monsters, gore and sex. Their other strengths lie in their authentic Romanian locations and director Nicolaou's fine visual sense. Like the PUPPETMASTER series the first of these vampire films is probably the weakest. The story opens with King Vlad (Dracula himself?) as an aged vampire who has maintained a long truce with the humans thanks to the "Bloodstone," a rock that secretes the blood of the saints, which can placate a vampire's bloodlust. With the aid of his minions, tiny demon-like creatures of the title, Vlad's evil son, Radu, plans to kill brother Stefan as well and descend on humankind.

If this sounds fairly interesting, it's not. The titular minions never do much, except remind us that David Allen still does fine work. The film soon gets bogged down with three luscious American students, one of whom falls in love with Stefan. By then even Nicolaou's patented visuals aren't enough to maintain interest. It's all too predictable, up to the sequel promising ending.



Jeffrey Combs as DOCTOR MORDRID, with apologies to Edgar Allan Poe and Marvel.

DOCTOR MORDRID ★★

Directed by Charles & Albert Band. 1990. 74 mins. Starring: Jeffrey Combs, Brian Thompson, Yvette Nipar.

Band, who apparently never discards anything, hatched this Dr. Strange clone idea, in conjunction with legendary Marvel Comics writer Jack Kirby, back in his Empire days. But the Bands blow the promising concept. A surprisingly restrained Combs is the title character, a powerful sorcerer who watches over the Earth from a command center hidden in the apartment building he owns. Lacking the budget for a protracted confrontation between Mordrid and Kabal (Thompson), his magical antagonists. Band pads the film with uninteresting subplots.

The Harryhausen-styled battle of a Tyrannosaurus skeleton and a woolly mammoth skeleton, is a minor gem from Dave Allen, but is

whole family could watch and enjoy, without any hard edge. For a while we were calling it Full Moon Lite, something that wouldn't have any sex at all, not that our pictures have a lot of it, and no violence... Something that was not aimed for kids, because then you kind of exclude a lot of your genre fans, so it's tricky. It's not easy making that kind of movie."

Concerning Full Moon's penchant for sequels and series, Band noted, "In a lot of ways I think Full Moon is like a network in video. We release pilots for features. If they work well, they go to series, and Moonbeam is very much the same, so we have to get the retailers and the consumers ready to trust the program. Once they do, your job is made a lot easier."

But is Band attracted to the fantasy and horror genres? Apart from their built-in audience, often regardless of quality, the genre requires no stars to promote interest and doesn't tend to age in the same manner as contemporary films do. Band traces his fascination back to his childhood.

"As a kid I loved watching these movies," he said. "First of all, I was a kind of horror genre buff when it came to comic books, not just Marvel Comics, but even pre-Marvel comics and monster magazines. I never got enough of good sci-fi-horror films because at an early age I left the States and you could only catch them if you're a little kid on TV, and they were few and far between. Then in Europe there weren't many. There were some revival houses you could go to. I saw some of my early sci-fi horror films in French or Italian, so it was a weird experience. But I saw enough to be excited and happy about those films, and when I got back to the States for a few weeks periodically, I made a point of catching everything I could.

"I just love genre films. They are great escapism fare. It's just interesting to see pictures that were somewhat cultish when I was a little kid, and certainly they weren't mainstream movies, [but] since STAR WARS I

guess [they have] become the only mainstream, the big event movies. Seven out of the ten top grossing films of all time are genre films. Sometimes I say, I don't mean to put down any of the movies because they're wonderful films, but in a lot of ways these are Full Moon films with \$80 million budgets. They're big, big, big genre films with lots of money and fantastic special effects. Back in the '60s and '70s, no one was making these movies except for the occasional film that slipped through. This was the exclusive domain of AIP and Corman and people before my time."

Another reason for the emphasis away from theatrical films is simply that most people are more likely to see movies in their living rooms than in a theatre. The video retailers manage a \$17 billion business as compared to a \$5 billion U.S. theatrical business. The video stores need more than a few blockbusters a year to offer their customers, and as avid renters select several titles a week, the big name titles are quickly used up. Band's company offers films that fill in the demand for particular kinds of films.

"Fans know when they see PUPPETMASTER they're not looking at an \$80 million [movie]. Somehow they know. You don't underestimate their intelligence, but still it's tricky.

MRAS-1 from ROBOT WARS (1993), the second of Band's thematic follow-ups at Full Moon to Empire's ROBOT JOX, graced by superb effects by David Allen.

“Our plan at Full Moon is to release our own stuff. Every week someone says, ‘Here’s a horror film,’ and we don’t even look at it.”

—Producer Charles Band—



If nothing else, Band has proven himself a master of advertising, the poster art by Lee McCloud for NETHERWORLD, a Full Moon staple.

You throw a cassette in the machine and maybe you just watched a \$20-30 million major film, and now you're watching a picture that cost less than 10% of that, so we have to be pretty good at what we do.

"The success of our label is the loyalty. Without overdoing it, and not making a comparison to Disney, if you talk to most video retailers, they'll confirm

that the only label that has that loyalty, that awareness, and 'we'll buy every single release' is Full Moon. There is no other label out there that does it because there is no other label that produces a certain kind of movie and that has consistently done well. The retailers can rely on and the fans can rely on us. The average retailer will buy a certain amount of copies of every Full Moon film, but of course that all changes the day we burn them.

"The day a bad movie comes down the pike and they feel ripped off, then they'll screen every movie. They will look at it, and make their decision on every film, but of course that's never going to happen because we are staying very true to maintaining the quality—and not just maintaining, we want to make it better. Better is the reason why we've done the studio. We're building up a whole backlot in Romania."

Added Dion, "We have a fan club with 50,000 members in it, and they all want anything. We have a mailer that our merchandising guy put together and you can buy scripts signed by Charlie or the director, you can buy stills from the films. As we go on and on, we'll make bigger and better things. You can buy T-shirts and sweatshirts, toys. We're just about at the point to do CD-Roms and all these new horizons for movies. Full Moon and Moonbeam have such a marketable and recognizable name that even though we don't have stars, we have been able to look into big toy deals which are being discussed."

The idea behind making certain pictures offshore is to take advantage of particular locations and try and get more value for the dollar. Some countries offer up inducements for coproductions to be done within their borders. Sometimes film funds are tied up in certain countries and can only be spent in those countries.

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over too quickly to salvage the film. "I think comic books are a continuing influence [on Band]," said Allen.

Mordrid needs to have been a character of panache, charm and daring. Combs plays him like a CPA taking an extension course magic class.

BAD CHANNELS NO ★

Directed by Ted Nicolaou. 1993. 90 mins. Starring: Martha Quinn, Paul Hipp, Charlie Spradling.

A comedy misfire about an alien who takes over a radio station and then somehow sucks attractive young Earth girls back through the radio waves and imprisons them in a bottle. For reasons never explained—which may be related to Band's desire to sell Moonstone Records—each of these remote kidnappings is prefaced by a live musical number performed for the victim. But the soundtrack music is excruciatingly lame. Band may be a master of low-budget fare, but as a music impresario he is clearly tone deaf.

Cute as a button, obnoxiously perky, former MTV VJ Quinn adds a hint of legitimacy to the proceedings and the captured girls are undeniably attractive, particularly Full Moon perennial Spradling.



"Tumbler" from SEED PEOPLE, silly monsters in a naked rip-off of Jack Finney's *Body Snatchers*.

SEED PEOPLE NO ★

Directed by Peter Manogian. 1993. 87 mins. Starring: Sam Hennings, Andrea Roth, Diane Witherspoon.

While his results may vary, one

Bad is the operative word in this Full Moon misfire about an alien who takes over a radio station.



of the consistently positive aspects of Band's oeuvre is the originality of his concepts. Rarely does he tread on any of the well worn paths of earlier genre fare. This is a painfully notable exception. It's also indifferently acted, slowly paced, features silly-looking monsters, along with abrupt story changes and heavy narration that imply behind-the-scenes production problems as well. But what makes this so unpleasant a viewing experience is that the story is a shameless ripoff of 1956's *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*, belying any claims of homage—this is out-and-out plagiarism. Still, it's not all that much worse than Abel Ferrara's legitimate remake, but that credit: "From an idea by Charles Band" grates. It ought to read, "Idea by Jack Finney, Daniel Mainwaring and Don Siegel."

FULL MOON EFFECTS

LOW-BUDGET MAGIC

Band competes with the big boys, doing CGI work in-house at a reasonable cost.

By Les Paul Robley

Science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke has been fairly on the money anticipating certain future developments in his stories. None could probably affect the film community more than his "think movies," dream-like film scenarios created by a person hooked up to a home computer terminal. Who would've thought that even a glimmer of it might surface before the year 2001?

Some effects artists could see the writing on the wall after watching the tentacle from *THE ABYSS* rear its watery head out of that 1989 James Cameron film. Some even feared that traditional full-size creatures would be things of the past, especially after hearing Steven Spielberg remark, concerning *JURASSIC PARK*, that if he'd known computer-generated images (CGI) looked as good as they did, he would never have had the large-scale models built.

CGI is becoming faster and more economical by the day. Producers can now afford to make effects shows at a price

that won't break studios' budgets. As filmmakers approach the threshold deciding whether it's cheaper to have a model constructed or a computer graphic accomplished, when all the below-the-line costs equal the price of a computer scan and the rendering looks just as real, one can guess which way the decision will fall.

Thus far, film-quality CGI has been priced out of the reach of most low-budget producers. Either it was prohibited to expensive Silicon Graphics (SGI) platforms, or relegated to the realm of video and television productions. But, as computer prices continue to plummet and chips become more powerful, more and more filmmakers will be able to sample the goods without blazing a trail to the poor house.

Now, more digital film recording houses have made themselves available as third-party service bureaus, aggressively marketing their scanning/recording services, so prices are dropping. Companies like Dream Quest's Motion Pixel, Pacific Title Digital, RCG

Laboratories and Optical Cinema Service at one time relied on proprietary film formats which made it difficult for low-end computer users to employ. Now they accommodate several of the most popular file formats, such as PICT, which anyone using SGI to Macintosh to Amiga can utilize and make economically feasible.

Paul Gentry, visual effects supervisor and DP at VFX Digital (Full Moon Entertainment's digital right arm), realized early on that to produce science fiction and fantasy films economically, they must resort to an in-house computer work station for CGI and digital compositing. "The reason we set up this department is because we do so many genre films here and we have so many effects shots," he said. "For years the houses around town have charged such a premium for blue screen. I'm trying to make blue screen look like a nothing, a minimal expense. Also, I want to obtain control of the shots right under the auspices of the effects supervisors and directors who work here, who won't have to



Writer/director C. Courtney Joyner turns in a Full Moon gem, almost up to Band's 1984 original.

TRANCERS III: DETH LIVES ★★★

Directed by C. Courtney Joyner. 1993. 83 mins. Starring: Tim Thomerson, Melanie Smith, Andrew Robinson, Helen Hunt, Megan Ward.

The *TRANCERS* series handily bounces back to form with this action-packed sequel that neatly wraps up all the loose ends from the preceding films and sets up an interesting and expansive new direction for the series. All courtesy of director/writer C. Courtney Joyner (also the author of *PRISON, DR. MORDRID* and *PUPPETMASTER III* for Band.) Jack is snatched to a future beyond his own where the Trancers have nearly overrun mankind. He's then zapped back to the start of this particular crisis, 2005, where he has to stop a sadistic military officer from creating the murderous Trancers. Jack reluctantly accepts a job at the end as a time-traveling troubleshooter with his powerful new partner, Shark.

MANDROID NO ★

Directed by Jack Ersgard. 1993. 81 mins. Starring: Brian Cousins, Jane Caldwell, Curt Lowens, Michael DellaFemina.

An attempt to shift to more action-oriented fare, but the results

A baby Night Scorpion from *OBLIVION*. Below: Effects chief Joe Grossberg and animator Joel Fletcher film the scorpion finale.





A stone giant comes to life in the upcoming Moonbeam release **MAGIC ISLAND**. Inset: Working on the stop-motion set-up, supervisor Joe Grossberg (r) and animator Joel Fletcher, Harryhausen-style.



make time-wasting trips to the local effects house checking on shots. The idea is to turn out more shots for the same kind of money than just a few blue screens. We can now do another 50% more shots since we're doing them in-house and we're not worried about the profit margin or overhead."

Unlike other low-budget CGI companies, Full Moon is trying to accomplish everything at film resolution. Even though most of their releases are direct-to-video, they are trying to anticipate new technologies, such as HDTV. That way, no matter what format comes out in the future, their effects will look decent. By compositing with a high resolution of 1-1/2k x 2k, Full Moon's special

Jimmy Scags as Buteo, menaced by a baby Night Scorpion. Full Moon's in-house effects facility features impressive computer capabilities.



effects will, hopefully, not look inferior when judged next to a normal live-action 3k x 4k 35mm film resolution image.

Full Moon began their digital odyssey in September 1993 with an investment of just \$50,000 in equipment, and in less than six months established a full-fledged digital work station unit producing CGI and digital compositing just like the big boys. The equipment consists of five Amiga 4000s with Video Toaster 3.0 software, and three Quadra 950s by Macintosh, along with the necessary type drives, hard drives, scanners and other accessories.

For CGI software, Full Moon relies primarily on Light-Wave 3D with its enhanced features for the Video Toaster 4000. Shunning SGI "glamour software" such as FLAME or MATADOR because of their high single limited license costs (up to \$120,000 for FLAME per station), Full Moon's two digital composite work stations in-

corporate Adobe Systems Photoshop 2.5.1 and COSA After-Effects 2.0 software, two standards for image processing on the Mac. According to one of Full Moon's digital designers, Chris Biggs, who began his film career as an (analog) makeup effects artist on CRITTERS and the NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET films, this advanced version of Mac software "allows for the most image control of any programs available."

According to Gentry, an automated wire removal program may be slated for the Mac down the line. They currently rely on tools in Photoshop to delete unwanted objects such as rods holding puppets or dirt in the frame. "We normally don't have this problem since rod puppets and models are covered with the same blue print as the background screen and they generally drop out. If not, it's just a flick of the mouse in roto and they're gone."

More Full Moon effects

are nowhere near Bilson and DeMeo's enjoyable comic book Empire effort **ELIMINATORS**. Like that film, **MANDROID** aspires to create a team of heroes who battle the proverbial bad guys. This time, instead of the half-man/half-tank of **ELIMINATORS**, the Mandroid is a powerful robot, remote-controlled by a paraplegic scientist via a virtual reality headset. An invisible man and a lovely blonde scientist round out the team. As an antagonist there's the expected mad scientist, heavily scarred behind a metal mask, and a potentially interesting setting: an emerging former Soviet block country. Can you say Romania? But it is all undone by a lackluster cast and lifeless direction. Worst of all, it all ends, neatly set up for—*gasp*—a sequel.

"Around Full Moon there are a couple of films that everyone knows there should never be a sequel to," said Jeff Burr, director of **PUPPETMASTER IV** and **V**. "That's **DOLLMAN**, **MANDROID** and **BAD CHANNELS**. Of course all three of them have had sequels anyway."



MANDROID with Patrick Ersgard as Joe, an attempt by Full Moon to shift to more action-oriented fare.

ROBOT WARS NO ★

Directed by Albert Band. 1993. 106 mins. Starring: Don Michael Paul, Barbara Crampton, James Staley, Peter Haskell.

Losing control of **ROBOT JOX** must have been a frustrating experience for Band. As if to vent his disappointment he has twice since returned to giant robot territory. First

The least of three Band-produced sagas of future robot warfare, directed by father Albert Band.



in the competent **CRASH AND BURN**, and more recently in the abysmal **ROBOT WARS**.

Thematically the film is essentially a follow up, taking place only a few years after the **ROBOT JOX** time period. Aesthetically it's not even a patch on its enjoyable predecessor. Leadenly directed by the elder Band, the film has nothing to recommend it beyond David Allen's typically satisfactory effects. Lead Paul is an astoundingly bad actor, while the normally reliable and charming Crampton seems embarrassed by her involvement. While visually interesting, the scorpion-like design of the main robot is laughably impractical as both a means of transport and as a weapon.

DOLLMAN VS. DEMONIC TOYS

NO ★

Directed by Charles Band. 1993. 84 mins. Starring: Tim Thomerson, Tracy Scoggins, Melissa Behr, Phil Brock.

Thomerson, Scoggins and Behr reprise their key roles from, respectively, **DOLLMAN**, **DEMONIC TOYS** and **BAD CHANNELS**, three of Full Moon's worst efforts, and fails to rise even to their sub-standards.

Once again the toys are out for blood and glam-cop Scoggins is out to stop them. She recruits Dollman to help her, but the shrunken Ginger (from **BAD CHANNELS**) ends up in the hands of the toys, and as object of Baby Doll's lustful desires. Effects are minimal, sets are threadbare and acting is only adequate, a rare misstep for Band with video retailers, who generally swear by his label's product. Many complained that the already brief running time was heavily padded with footage from the previous films. It seems lots longer.

BLOODSTONE: SUBSPECIES II

★★★

Directed by Ted Nicolaou. 1993. 107 mins. Starring: Anders Hove, Denice Duff, Melanie Shatner.

Interest in Coppola's **DRACULA** made this one of Full Moon's biggest successes to date. A

A minor gem among vampire films due to the lush imagery and style of director Ted Nicolaou.



A spaceship roars into frame in **OBLIVION**, composite supervised by Joe Grossberg. Top Right: The background plate, without matte painting of the town in the distance, shot at Antelope Valley. Bottom Right: Motion-control ship element.

shots requiring one element of CGI or digital compositing take approximately one week per shot at a cost of \$2,000 to \$3,000 each. The more elements in a shot—such as the three shrunken heads flying around simultaneously—demand three times the scanning cost for each blue screen element, plus three times the labor.

For **OBLIVION 1** and **2**, various shots of a spaceship landing in the desert were filmed via motion control by effects supervisor Joe Grossberg and programmer Les Paul Robley, and digitally composited. The opening title shot for the movie had its share of problems when smoke, exhaust glow and a shadow all had to be added to a ship model "after the fact." The model hadn't been designed with the idea of adding a smoke jet or a separate light pass inside the engines. Thus, computers were reburied to "fix it in post."

Digital supervisor Paul Gentry prefers electronic compositing to optical printing because there are no matte lines to speak of, creating flawless shots more

readily. One can pull a previous sequence of images from many backgrounds, or render elements straight onto those backgrounds. The foreground elements end up becoming anti-aliased to the background elements. There is absolutely no stair-stepping on a diagonal matte line. The computer averages out the pixels to make fine gradation between the color of the foreground object and the color of the background object. One achieves perfect anti-aliasing together with no semblance of border detection, which can be a problem with travelling mattes, since the human eye is like a built-in edge detector.

With this in mind, Full Moon Entertainment's VFX Digital department is not above using traditional opticals when the need presents itself. For the film **DARK ANGEL**, Gentry and Robley superimposed a 45-inch diameter glowing plexiglass sphere over shots of the angel floating around her parents' room. This effect was patterned after the Glynda, the Good Witch opticals from the 1939

version of **THE WIZARD OF OZ**, but aligned in the camera using today's technology. A videotape of the pre-existing footage striped with timecode was re-positioned to fill the Fries camera videotape ground-glass markings using the Panasonic MX-50 frame grabber and digital-shrink button. The tape was then synced to the motion-control rig by means of the timecode-trigger start switch built into the Kuper RTMC software. This enabled the cast and crew to witness the finished composite after each take on video, engaging the MX-50's luminance key capability.

The stage had been previously draped with black Duvateen to negate the need for any garbage matting by the optical company doing the composite. Gentry wanted to make it as easy as possible for the technician performing the optical. Gentry felt that this simple superimposition technique was the best, least expensive and easiest method for achieving this particular effect in the film.

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The effects element for the motion-control ascent of Veronica, the dark angel played by Angela Featherstone (below) in Full Moon's new **DARK ANGEL: THE ASCENT**.



Featherstone was filmed against black Duvateen, and matted into the background plate of her cel (below), superimposed against a 45-inch glowing sphere.



Band argues that the reason for setting up a studio partnership in Romania, given his experiences in Italy, is "to get more bang for the buck. The unfortunate thing with Italy was that after a few short years there conditions changed so drastically; we were making pictures more expensively. I don't anticipate this happening. I think we've chosen very wisely with Romania for many, many years. We're able to shoot more weeks and get more value and get better things with some of our films, but not with all of them." The production crews are a combination of Romanian locals and Americans. Much of the SUBSPECIES series for example took advantage of Romanian castles, forests, mountains and other bits of local color.

What's it like toiling in Band's Romanian vineyards? "We're not talking about southern California in Eastern Europe," said David Allen, after he finished directing THE PRIMEVALS in Romania for Full Moon and found that bad weather played havoc with scheduling. "People came to southern California 50 or 60 years ago for a reason. They've lost a lot of days on other Full Moon features because of this situation. It can be ruinous."

Nor was the weather the only major difference from working in southern California. "There are sources of many of the things that we are used to obtaining that can be found in Bucharest," explained Allen, "but people are not experienced in the prop departments or the art department. They don't have a Rolodex mentality. They don't even have Yellow Pages. In some ways, they're very new at what they need to understand. Partly, it's that the sources of material aren't as well supplied, and partly it's a matter of mentality, a kind of ex-communist country mentality which is not strong on initiative, and sort of leaves you in the lurch sometimes without anyone feeling

“Full Moon’s really like the old studio system, yet everyone has a voice here. At Full Moon everyone has creative input.”

—Executive Debbie Dion—



Mark Rappaport puppeteers Blade for Full Moon's first release PUPPETMASTER (1989). Rappaport now runs Full Moon's in-house makeup effects unit.

particularly as though they've failed you."

As an example, Allen recalled filming an attack upon Shepas by Yeti at the beginning of the picture, in which Allen was trying to create an aura of chaos and pandemonium. "One of the things that I wanted were dogs," said Allen. "They were clearly called for in the storyboards that were sent ahead of us many weeks before we arrived, and when the day came, there were no dogs. The second a.d. from Romania, when I asked him why there weren't any dogs, said, 'Well, the circus isn't in town this week.'

"I thought, 'Well, that's not quite the answer.' In the first place, the circus might not have been able to give us the kind of dogs we wanted. I didn't want poodles and pom-pommed pests with a ball on their nose. Then he offered, 'We have a lot of

wild dogs,' which they do, running loose in the studio there, but they are not husky dogs. It's ridiculous that they could have even been considered to be acceptable. Both suggestions were equally ludicrous."

As another example, Allen recalled filming a press conference which is meant to introduce the Yeti to the scientific community and the world. "It was supposed to have much more the nature of a true press conference than we ended up with," said Allen. "When we got to the location, no cameras were there. No cameras were provided. We had to scramble together cameras from the camera truck, and from some of the American cast and crew that happened to have brought them just for their own tourist purposes. There was no prop master working ahead of the production to make sure [props were available]."

Full Moon did 20 pictures in 1993, and had about 20 scheduled for

'94. Full Moon has its own in-house special effects operation, its own directors of photography and on-staff art directors and prop shops, which makes it a full-time major operation. Effects experts Mark Rappaport, Randy Cook and David Allen, among others, regularly provide effects shots for Full Moon productions.

"It's really like the old studio system, yet everyone has a voice here," said Dion. "We send a script around saying, 'Can we do this?' and then we'll meet and say, 'No, maybe we can do it better this way.' So it's not just like they get a script and say, 'Here, do it and show us when you're done.' Everybody has creative input and everybody is a winner for it. ...It's like old Hollywood, it really is. They're working here year round."

Forthcoming Full Moon

short prologue revamps the first film's ending by quickly eliminating good guy vampire Stefan and reviving the evil Radu. The story then details Radu's attempts to bring Michelle (now portrayed by pale, brunette beauty Duff) into the vampire fold, and her attempts to protect her sister from both Radu, and herself. The film overflows with imagery, atmosphere and style that would seem beyond a Band budget, thanks to director Nicolaou, who has been with Band since Empire, editing early films and writing ASSAULT OF THE KILLER BIMBOS along the way. Watch for Nicolaou to make the break from Full Moon as soon as someone notices what he's capable of.

In a gutsy, but ill-considered move, Band allows the film to end with Michelle being dragged away by Radu's mummified mother, with the sequel months away. The misstep keeps this minor gem from being a minor classic.

PREHYSTERIA ★

Directed by Charles and Albert Band. 1993. 86 mins. Starring: Austin O'Brien, Brett Cullen, Colleen Morris, Samantha Mills.

Full Moon's first offspring, the family-oriented Moonbeam label, got off to a great start with an effort that sold like proverbial hotcakes thanks to clever timing, coming right after JURASSIC PARK. Also credit dumb luck— young Austin O'Brien landed the juvenile lead in the heavily hyped LAST ACTION HERO—and the consistent fascination kids have for dinosaurs.



The loveable, doll-like T-Rex of PREHYSTERIA, Moonbeam's wildly successful freshman effort.

"My hope, when I started, was that by casting younger, or lesser-known performers, that some day I would have a library of titles that featured the early work of some major names," said Band. "People like Helen Hunt, Demi Moore, Stan Winston, Greg Cannom, Andy Davis, Mac Ahlberg. Not that I 'discovered' these people, but our early work together gave some impetus to all our careers. It still excites me to feel I'm working with major new talent. I don't want to slight anyone by being too specific, but I think it's happening right now for Megan Ward, who worked quite a bit for me a couple of years ago, and it just happened for Austin O'Brien, who has gone on to LAST ACTION HERO and MY GIRL 2."

Band's pygmy dinosaurs have quite a bit of personality and move believably within the film's limited demands, thanks to rod and cable control coordinator Mark Rappaport

and dimensional animator David Allen. But the creatures have more personality than the cast and move at a better pace than the film. Band's only slip-up was not signing O'Brien to a sequel, but it's doubtful fans missed him in *PREHYSTERIA II* and *III*, since the dinosaurs are the draw.

BEACH BABES FROM BEYOND INFINITY ★

Directed by Ellen Cabot (David DeCoteau). 1993. 78 mins. Starring: Sara Bellomo, Tamara Landry, Nicole Posey, Joe Estevez, Linnea Quigley.

Band's second "Brand Name" label, Torchlight Video, headed by Band perennial David DeCoteau, doing what he does best, delivering the goods for less. DeCoteau directs this *BEACH PARTY*-with-breasts story himself, working under his femme "nom de flick," Ellen Cabot.

There is about as much story here as the average Annette and Frankie opus, which is to say, none. Three joy-riding space babes run out of fuel in Daddy's space-rod and crash in the ocean. The film got some publicity by advertising appearances by: Estevez (Joe), Swayze (Don), Travolta (Joey) and Stallone (Jaqueline), all relatives of better-known performers. It also features no-budget stalwarts Burt Ward and Linnea Quigley, who finally plays a character close to her own age. This reportedly had to be recut to garner an R-rating, thanks to DeCoteau's predilection for full frontal male and female nudity. Band should consider reinserting the footage for cable TV sales, where this thing should run eternally at 2:00 AM.



CGI effects by Montreal's DHD Post Image can't save *ARCADE*, a boring, juvenile *TRON* update.

ARCADE ★

Directed by Albert Pyun. 1994. 85 mins. Starring: Megan Ward, Peter Billingsley, John Delancie, Norbert Weisser.

I don't know what goes wrong when Pyun and Band come together, but the results here and in *DOLLMAN* are excruciating. This is basically a juvenile version of *TRON*. Megan Ward was too old for a teen role four years ago in *CRASH AND BURN*, DeLancie is wasted in a needless role and Billingsley isn't growing up as cute as he was in *A CHRISTMAS STORY*. Only Pyun regular Weisser brings any panache to his role. First advertised in 1992, this came close to being an unreleaseable disaster for Full Moon. Most of the footage has Pyun's visual style so it seems likely re-editing and updated effects were causes of the delay. The CGI effects are fine (the basis for the one star rating), but they only amount to about ten minutes, nearly all of it at the end, and they're



A *MANDROID* sequel disguised as something else, but nevertheless as bad as its dull predecessor.

more "fun to look at" than exciting. A sequel is planned, sans Pyun.

BLOODLUST: SUBSPECIES III ★★

Directed by Ted Nicolaou. 1994. 83 mins. Starring: Denice Duff, Melanie Shatner, Anders Hove, Pamela Gordon.

The *SUBSPECIES* series ends with a shrug. Nicolaou again delivers oodles of mood, atmosphere and imagery, and manages to create cinematic illusions that are effective far beyond their simple, budget-conscious, designs. But we have seen it all twice before. Scenes of Duff slowly being seduced into the darkness of the vampire life are effective, even spooky. Not so, the listless, endless scenes of Shatner, an unconvincing performer, searching for her sister. The final battle at the castle unwisely brings in a gun-wielding CIA agent and destroys much of the timeless feel the locations, and Nicolaou's style, have so well established.

"The first few days I had trouble committing to it, playing it completely serious," said Duff. "The [subspecies are] these funny little comic monsters. My character is grounded in reality, but all I wanted to do was laugh."

INVISIBLE: THE CHRONICLES OF JONATHAN KNIGHT NO ★

Directed by Jack Ersgard. 1994. 80 mins. Starring: Brian Cousins, Jennifer Nash, Michael DellaFemina, Curt Lowens.

What do you do when your fiscal stability depends on creating films that spawn numerous sequels, but you have a film that few even finished watching, let alone longed for a follow up to. That was the conundrum facing Band after the release of *MANDROID*. Did he mate it with some other recent misfire, as he had done with *DOLLMAN VS DEMONIC TOYS*? How close we might have gotten to *MANDROID BATTLES THE SEEDPEOPLE*, we may never know. Instead, Band just hid the fact that *INVISIBLE* is a *MANDROID* sequel and implied that it was the first of a likely new series.

"The long-term plan for a superhero team has been taking shape in what I see as 'pilot' films,

introducing those characters," said Band. "*MANDROID* and *INVISIBLE* are part of that. I plan to introduce a couple more this year, and some super-villains as well. Eventually we'll bring them altogether in kind of a super-bash."

Despite his titular promotion, invisible man Benjamin Knight remains a supporting player here, as he was in the first film. An attempt is made to liven up the proceedings by tossing in sword fights, car chases, sex scenes, gun battles, escaped lunatics and even a new, militaristic bad guy. How you can take those elements and still make a dull film is beyond me, but director Ersgard manages.

TRANCERS 4: JACK OF SWORDS ★

Directed by David Nutter. 1994. 74 mins. Starring: Tim Thomerson, Stacie Randall, Ty Miller, Terri Ivens.

Instead of the futuristic trouble-shooter C. Courtney Joyner established in #3, we get Jack Deth meets *SUBSPECIES*, all for the sake of economical Romanian locations, which are starting to look a little familiar. As the king of the vampires, sorry, Trancers, Clabe Hartley looks great, but doesn't really convey a proper sense of menace. Jeff Moldovan, who also did stunt coordination, is simply awful as a daring member of the rebels. He was obviously given the role in return for a good rate on the stunts, but he's a terrible actor and the stunts don't look that good either. Only Terri Ivens, as a sword-wielding female member of the rebels, brings any flash to her role, and her looks are an asset as well. Band should be casting her as a sword-wielding *femme fatale* in a series of fantasy-adventure films instead of wasting her in supporting roles in dreck like this.



Chandra West, Gordon Currie and Jason Adams engage in puppet research in *PUPPETMASTER IV*.

PUPPETMASTER IV ★

Directed by Jeff Burr. 1994. 80 mins. Starring: Gordon Currie, Chandra West, Jason Adams, Guy Rolfe.

While #3 in this series opened things up with a more expansive setting, multiple characters, and large doses of puppet lore, #4 is a throwback to the lesser initial entries. We are back in that damn Bodega Bay Hotel, where a handful of attractive young people get bumped off by the puppets. It took five screenwriters for this?

Thrown into the mix is Sutek, a supposedly omnipotent demonic being, who never leaves his low-rent hellish empire and his nasty servants, the Totems. The new puppet is Decapitron (the title of an unmade

titles include David Allen's *THE PRIMEVALS* and Stuart Gordon's *CAS-TLE FREAK*, both potential theatrical releases, per Band, as well as *DR. MORDRID II* and others. Plans for theatrical releases, however, have mostly been put on hold.

"I've learned especially in the last few years," said Band, "that the cost of releasing pictures in this country and the competition in our own genres is astronomical. How can you compete with a major that takes out a \$60-100 million genre film and spends \$30 million over a weekend? I hope for the best and think there's room for the right film we make with at least a small theatrical.

"Whether it is a picture like *PRIMEVALS* that really deserves, I think, a big break—and hopefully we'll find the right partner to help fund that—or it's a smaller film like *CAS-TLE FREAK*, which deserves to come out in the top 15 or 20 cities, I just think now looking forward into these more expensive years, we should just be cautious and say look, we plan to release it at least in a marginal way. We hope some of the players out there set up to take pictures out theatrically will be interested in our film, but it's very tough today to predict what kind of theatrical release *PRIMEVALS* will have two years from now."

One of the more talked-about proposed Full Moon titles is Stuart Gordon's planned adaptation of *SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH*. But don't expect to see the film any time soon. "It's taken years to get the rights problems cleared," said Band. "But ironically after all that hard work, it's a very difficult picture to afford, even stretching our budget range. It takes place underwater and on the water and there is no more expensive place to shoot a movie on the planet than in or on or underwater.

"We all love the project. I did a presale piece of art years ago which we all fell in love with, which is hanging in our halls here [and also gracing this issue's cover]. It's the one that people respond to more than anything else. I'd love to make it just to have said to the world,

'Hey, we finally got this thing done,' but we have to find a way to do it reasonably."

The future of Torchlight, Band's erotic label, seems dim at the moment. Intended to present fantasy films with an erotic slant, albeit R rated with no NC-17 titles, the releases have not proven to be outstanding films or outstanding sellers. There are five other Torchlight films in the can, in various stages of postproduction. "As the results come in, we'll see if it makes any sense to continue making any films for that label," said Band. The remaining Torchlight titles are GIRL TALK CONFIDENTIAL, HUNTRESS, LURID TALES, VIRGIN HUNTERS and BLONDE HEAVEN, all due this year.

"The novel thing about this kind of erotic fantasy label," said Band of his concept, "is that there is no violence. They [retailers] will listen to me and they'll say, 'Oh, you mean you're making a label of erotic thrillers.' No, because erotic thrillers, which I personally detest with some exceptions, are pictures which mix sex and violence. You'll have a beautiful women in one scene and in the next scene they are getting cut up. I don't want to make those movies. These are pictures that are erotic fantasy films that have good stories, hopefully. Some are more Harlequin romance types, some are more gothic, some are silly, but at their core, they are erotic fantasy films and they are not violent. All I can do is start making it and people will understand what they are."

Added Dion, "They are very sexy movies and there are always some kind of genre element, effects, fantasy, to it as well, but we never link sex and death...I think they'll be a bigger and bigger market. I think they're fun, and men love them. And I think people just aren't having sex as much as they were because you can't, so that

“We’re spending more money and we’re trying harder to make better movies. The current Full Moon slate is ambitious.”

—Producer Charles Band—



SPIRIT OF THE NIGHT stars Jenna Bodner as the titular shapeshifter, for the erotic Torchlight label. Inset: Linnea Quigley with Dave DeCoteau, director for Torchlight under alias "Ellen Cabot."



market will be bigger and bigger."

After Band revised Full Moon's marketing plan late last year, rumors abounded that Paramount, Band's video distributor, had become disenchanted with the sales of the company's horror and erotic titles and had cut off funding to his operation. Band said this was not the case. "Paramount is our distributor, not our financial partner," declared Band. "Their interest in the exotic titles may have diminished, but not the horror. We have delivered all the films we have been contracted for. Certain films that we announced have been scrapped due to our own determination of a lack of potential in the horror marketplace."

According to director Stuart

Gordon, who is finishing CASTLE FREAK for Full Moon, "Completion bond companies are finishing the films that were started but not finished. The movies that had not begun are being put on hold."

Band denied Gordon's assertion that completion bond insurance funds had to be called into play and noted that Paramount doesn't fund Full Moon. "Paramount only funds the Moonbeam line," he said.

Noted Nina Stern, VP of publicity at Paramount Home Video, "There are no changes in our relationship with Full Moon. We have a schedule of releases, and we are working with them on an ongoing basis."

Band traces the Paramount rumors to what he said was an erroneous story in *The Hollywood Reporter*. Explained Band, "We were about to start shooting a movie called RAG DOLL when all the numbers coming in were saying, maybe there's a different path here. A week before the picture was about to shoot, I decided basically not to shoot it—shut it down is a cruel way to put it. I still think RAG DOLL will see the light of day, but I think it's going to be tweaked a bit, made a little stronger so it has more of a chance to work when it gets made."

"Anyway, it was my decision. At the time we were shooting four movies. We were shooting the TIME WARRIOR shows, and CASTLE FREAK, and we were all over the place, so I decided not to make RAG DOLL. I think what happened is that some people who were unhappy with the decision, the loss of employment, went to the trades. At the exact time, that particular day, we happened to have a whole contingent of Paramount people over here for a meeting. It was really a marketing meeting. It had nothing to do with the production of movies. But somehow a week later in the *Reporter*, it said that

Empire film) who provides a new host for the life spirit of the original Puppetmaster himself, Toulon.

Like SUBSPECIES 2 & 3, this was shot back to back with #5, but at least has an ending. There's a promise of further, and grander, adventures but #4 is just an uninvolved quickie in an uneven series that may have worn out its welcome.

"The script was pretty good," said director Jeff Burr. "Lots of action, a quick pace, new characters and creatures. It would have made a good movie. Unfortunately, they wanted to make it into two movies and it just wasn't there. It all kind of drags now."

TEST TUBE TEENS FROM THE YEAR 2000 NO ★

Directed by Ellen Cabot (David DeCoteau). 1994. 74 mins. Starring: Ian Abercrombie, Brian Bremer, Christopher Wolf, Sara Suzanne Brown, Morgan Fairchild.

This title shows that the faults of Empire are not completely in the past for Band and company. This second release for the erotic oriented Torchlight label, was originally entitled, and advertised as, VIRGIN HUNTERS.

"TEST TUBE TEENS FROM THE YEAR 2000 is a revived Empire title, but it's a new script," said Band. "We shot it and started marketing it as VIRGIN HUNTERS. Then I did something that, in retrospect, was kind of dumb. Even though we'd already spent the marketing money, I decided the campaign didn't reflect that the film is a farce. So we spent the money again. I thought TEST TUBE TEENS was a hoot as a title, but it probably would have sold better as VIRGIN HUNTERS."

The story deals with three teens from 2019 (born in the title year) who travel back in time to stop Camella Swales (Fairchild) from establishing Mega Conglomerate, instituting the total abolition of sex. This cheaply made would-be comedy features about three mild laughs. There's little display of female flesh and even less sex. This is precisely the sort of dreck that preceded Empire's fall.



Courtland Mead and Yowler, the baby dragon of DRAGONWORLD, one of Band's finest productions.

DRAGONWORLD ★★★★★

Directed by Ted Nicolaou. 1994. 84 mins. Starring: Sam McKenzie, Brittney Powell, John Calvin, John Woodvine, Andrew Keir.

While recent Full Moon releases have been a little stale, this latest Moonbeam title establishes once again that when he hits the target, Band has no present day peer in the

production of quality, low-budget, genre material.

Andrew Keir, unrecognizable from his Quatermass days, gives a wonderful performance as Angus McGowan, who bequeaths his son a castle and a dragon named Yowler. This is the first Full Moon film that might have worked without its fantasy elements, basically a variation on FREE WILLY. The young McGowan (McKenzie) is lured into leasing Yowler to a Rupert Murdoch type (Woodvine), for exhibition in a "Dragonworld" theme park.

The film's effects are quite good, the standout being a Harryhausen-esque confrontation between Yowler and his keepers, the best sequence David Allen has yet delivered for a Band film. Mark Rappaport supplies a convincing full-size animatronic dragon head to interact with the cast. There's even some nice CGI effects for the flying sequences, courtesy of Randy Cook. Everyone involved seems to have been inspired to do something special on this one. Richard Band supplies an enjoyable score, the cast, often a Full Moon sore spot, doesn't have a weak link in it and Nicolaou again manages to make his directorial skills fit the subject rather than overwhelm it.



The grown Yowler, with Brittney Powell and Sam McKenzie in DRAGONWORLD, a fantasy gem.

The film handily meets Band's goal of entertaining children, and their parents. It would be ironic indeed, if after years of breasts, beasts and blood, Band's true calling is that of a low-budget Disney. A sequel is already in the offing, we can only hope it doesn't betray the original.

"I give credit to Charlie for committing that much resources to the picture," said Allen. "In fairness to the truth, I don't think he realized what the extent of that commitment was going to be, some of which is not his fault and some of which probably is his fault because he might not have listened when they told him he was making a very complicated kind of picture and there was no use in trying to pretend it wasn't. The production was a quarter of a million dollars overbudget."

"I've never had the dollars that some people get working for the majors," said Band. "I have to work with what I have, in our world. I don't hate any of the films I've produced. There are none that I wish I hadn't made. Some are better than others, but I like them for what they are rather than worrying about what they could have been, or should have been. I'm proud of many of them, TRANCERS, DOLLS, FROM



An imaginative, original and well-mounted production that shows Full Moon can deliver the goods.

BEYOND and of DRAGONWORLD. It's a good film."

LURKING FEAR ★

Directed by C. Courtney Joyner. 1994. 78 mins. Starring: Blake Bailey, Ashley Lauren, Jon Finch, Jeffrey Combs.

This return of Band to H.P. Lovecraft territory seemed to offer some promise. While master mythos interpreter Stuart Gordon wasn't involved, writer/director Joyner's presence promised more than is delivered. As he has done in the past with Band (PRISON, DR. MORDRID, TRANCERS III), Joyner weds horror with the action genre. As small town residents plot revenge on the subterranean cannibals who have plagued them for 20 years, led by the para-military Cathryn (Lauren), whose sister was snatched by the creatures, the group's plans are interrupted by the arrival of crooks come to dig up a body stuffed with cash. Joyner's interests are clearly with the crime story. Finch, too long away from genre fare, is starting to look like John Hurt, but is still a commanding presence, as Bennett, the leader of the hoods. Allison Mackie is also a standout as Bennet's glamorous enforcer, a woman who'll kill you, then check her makeup for smudges. As a straight crime story about the cash-stuffed corpse, this might have worked well. Wedded to Lovecraft's story of inbreeding and madness the results are far from satisfying.

"People wonder why, with all the financial ups and downs, Charlie gets the loyalty he does," said writer/director C. Courtney Joyner. "Now, I don't have any more projects planned at Full Moon, and tend to think my career is on the next level now. Recently I got a call from Ron Tappert to do a script for his HERCULES TV series. I happen to know that the night before he had dinner with Charlie. It's no coincidence. Charlie gets loyalty because he gives it."

DARK ANGEL ★★

Directed by L. Hassani. 1994. 80 mins. Starring: Angela Featherstone, Daniel Markel, Michael Genovese, Nicholas Worth.

Despite its faults, this is a most unusual and promising entry from

Full Moon. It's imaginative, original, and well mounted from a production standpoint, establishing its own complicated mythology and some unusual depths to the motivations of its main character. If the film has a notable antecedent it might be Wim Wenders' WINGS OF DESIRE, a film about an angel, who wants to be mortal, and spends time on Earth. This film's Veronica is a devil, a fallen angel, who dreams of the world above, the blue skies, the glowing sun, but whose experiences are hardly as lyrical as Wenders' creation. The film opens in Hell and somewhat shakily establishes its concept that all the demons are fallen angels, with atrophied wings, yet, who see themselves as still doing God's work, torturing the sinners he sends them. Each dreams of being redeemed and standing beside God again. Only the rebellious Veronica gets the chance. On the surface she befriends, and eventually loves an altruistic doctor while she continues her "job from hell" and punishes sinners.

Like Emmanuelle Beart's winged wonder in DATE WITH AN ANGEL, Featherstone's success as Veronica seems more the result of her unusual, almost unworldly, beauty than any great acting talent, but it's an auspicious debut under any circumstances. Same for director L. (Linda) Hassani, who hits the mark more often than she misses. It's rare to find a low-budget director who even realizes there's a target.



The creature played by Michael Todd in LURKING FEAR, a crime drama masquerading as horror.

PUPPETMASTER 5: THE FINAL CHAPTER ★

Directed by Jeff Burr. 1995. 81 mins. Starring: Gordon Currie, Chandra West, Ian Ogilvy, Guy Rolfe.

The series comes to an end none too soon with this upcoming Full Moon release. The story pretty much picks up right after the end of #4 with the usual gang of idiots breaking into the deserted Bodega Bay hotel, running around in dark halls to be killed off. Meanwhile the evil demon Sutek, from whom Toulon first got the puppet-animating formula, has sent another Totem creature to stop the formula from getting into human hands, and to kill the young, new puppetmaster.

Ian Ogilvy makes an appropriately slimy villain and it's fun to catch the cameos of Clu Gullagher, Diane McBain, Kaz Garas and Ron O'Neal, but the leads are bland and neither Sutek, nor his Totem, seem much of a threat. Burr, a capable director, does a professional job, trying to make all

Paramount comes in and shuts down production."

With the spectre of a financial crisis behind him, Band is also contemplating trying his hand at episodic television and considering launching a full comic book line, some of the titles of which could be made into Full Moon productions if they prove popular enough. Full Moon also has a CD line which releases the soundtracks of Full Moon films, as well as the occasional heavy metal groups such as Quiet Riot, Blue Oyster Cult and Edgar Winter. There were also plans for a home computer animation division.

"I hope we can surprise people pleasantly and then slowly upgrade the curve here and get to the point where two or three years from now these pictures are like tremendous films," said Band. "I just hope we can keep putting more money and more production value into these films so we can slowly make better movies. Part of that is just getting better at what we do. I think the current slate are certainly more ambitious and hopefully are going to be better as a crop of films than the first two or three years were. I'm not unhappy with the early PUPPETMASTERS and TRANCERS and SUBSPECIES and all those shows that started the company, but I know we're spending more money and we're trying harder to make better films. We'll see what happens with pictures like CASTLE FREAK and PRIMEVALS and others."

Band has consistently carved out a lucrative career providing low-budget genre entertainment. He has always had ambitious plans and built filmic empires which collapsed under the weight of them. But like a phoenix from the ashes, he has always risen again. Band has maintained a faith in the appeal of dimensional stop-motion animation and provided important creative opportunities for many effects artists. Perhaps most importantly, Band's product has caught the imagination of a whole new generation of genre film fans who remember his features fondly. □

FULL MOON EFFECTS

CREATURE CREATORS

Mark Rappaport heads-up Full Moon's in-house makeup and prosthetic shop.

By Dennis Fischer

According to Mark Rappaport, head of Full Moon's Creature FX shop, "What makes this creature effects shop work well and what makes our creatures turn out well is that Los Angeles has so many wonderful effects shops, and I've worked at so many of them, that I know a lot of good people whom I can call in to work over here, people who have worked for the Stan Winstons, the Rick Bakers—you name it, they've been through it already."

Rappaport has worked on projects as diverse as EDWARD SCISSORHANDS, KILLER KLOWNS FROM OUTER SPACE, HOWARD THE DUCK, THE FLY II and BATMAN RETURNS, before jumping on Full Moon's bandwagon.

One example of what his FX shop can do is the exo-skeleton for Dr. Zoetrope in JOSH KIRBY...TIME WARRIOR (see photo, page 25). Explains Rappaport, "I got this mandate from Full Moon to create this walk-around exo-skeleton. It's a big job to get a man in an eight-foot suit to look like it's an exo-skeleton. It's got to walk around and fly. They don't want to hear the excuse, 'Oh, we don't have enough money.' He [Charles Band] wants it done right and he wants it done inexpensively, and that's a tough mandate." Rappaport credited the terrific job to John Deall, Chris Cowan and



Puppeteering the cable-controlled full-size dragon head for Yowler in DRAGONWORLD, big-budget special effects quality for a fraction of the cost.

Kevin Marks.

Rappaport started off as an independent contractor for Full Moon. Now he has a personal contract with Charlie Band and they discuss the designs, ideas, people and finance needed to pull off a given project.

Because the effects shop is in-house, Band doesn't have to pay an overhead charge on the shop itself, making it cheaper than going to an outside shop. According to Rappaport, "The reality is you're paying people the same amount of money that you would at a big shop, but you're not paying the overhead, so it looks like a good cost to Full Moon, and it actually is a

good cost. They're getting a good quality product for what seems like a lesser price."

Rappaport's shop believes in recycling. An expensive mechanical armature built for DRAGONWORLD, for example, is given a new covering and used to create a sandshark for MAGIC ISLAND. "Todd Minobe took the mechanics from Baby Yowler and refitted it," said Rappaport, "which probably saves \$20,000 by taking mechanics that are already put together. For Full Moon, that's a big savings."

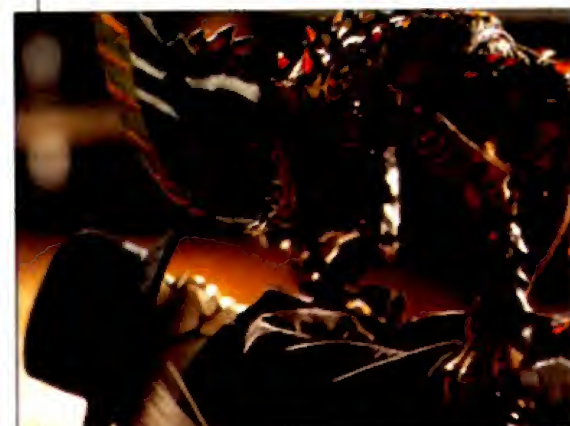
All creature effects begin with design, and the Creature FX shop employs Ralph Cordero and James Oxford as designers. "Everything at the shop has to be cleared through, not the director, but Charlie Band," said Rappaport. "If he doesn't like our designs, then we're back to the drawing board." Rappaport and his group like the setup, that there aren't endless committees that supply input that must be endured at the bigger studios.

Ralph Cordero designed Prizm for TIME WARRIORS with the help of Rappaport, Debbie Dione and Band. Prizm has fibre optics, which glow in different colors, instead of hair on his head. The character acts as a geiger counter warning system for time traveler Josh Kirby.

"This is a great character and we're hoping it can become a toy," said Rappaport of Prizm.

work again.

"Paramount apparently became disenchanted with the PUPPETMASTER series and said 'no more' after #5," noted Jay Wofel. "But Charlie doesn't let anything go to waste, so I'm co-writing a new series spin-off. It's a trilogy that might be seen as sort of a sequel to the prequel, in that they take place between PUPPETMASTER III's setting in time, and that of PUPPETMASTER I. They'll be called PUPPETWARS."



PUPPETMASTER 5 pits Blade against Totem, a tired end to a series that outlived its welcome.

TRANCERS 5: SUDDEN DEATH NO ★

Directed by David Nutter. 1995. 73 mins. Starring: Tim Thomerson, Terri Ivens, Clabe Hartley, Ty Miller, Stacie Randall.

"Lingering agony" would have been a better subtitle for this most unfortunate, closing chapter in the TRANCERS series, one of the greatest examples of a "stupid script" ever filmed. If the 73-minute running time seems brief, please remember that this includes a lengthy, and dull, recap of the previous film, and that even at that length, it seems interminable.

The story closely resembles one of those dreadful Italian sword and sandal non-epics of the '60s. Maciste, sorry, Jack Deth, goes on a quest where he encounters several uninteresting and unthreatening challenges before returning to where he started, to defeat the bad guy.

The move from the crisp sci-fi aspects of #1 and #3, to the hoary horror/fantasy clichés of #4 & #5 was foolish, and properly sounds the death knell for a once promising series. The ending seems to promise more adventures, but the box pronounces this the last. Whether this is due to Paramount's disenchantment or rumors of a falling out between Band and Thomerson (supposedly involving the use of off-shore dollars, useless

Tim Thomerson gallops in Romania in TRANCERS 5, locales that don't fit the sci-fi saga.



in the U.S., to pay Thomerson for these last two films) we will probably never know. Few, if any will mourn the loss at this point.

Trivia note: Yes, the director of the awful TRANCERS 4 & 5 is the same David Nutter who has dazzled us with a string of fine directorial efforts for FOX's X FILES TV series. Go figure.

SHRUNKEN HEADS ★★

Directed by Richard Elfman. 1995. 86 mins. Starring: Aeryk Egan, Becky Herbst, A.J. Damato, Meg Foster, Julius Harris.

Three young city kids try to fight back against a gang of local toughs and the city's crime boss, but end up murdered for their efforts. They are resurrected by the friendly owner of the local comic book stand, who happens to be a former voodoo enforcer from Papa Doc's days in Haiti and they become the flying title avengers, wreaking havoc on the city's criminal element.

All of this is played with offbeat humor best personified by Meg Foster's turn as the incredibly butch, lesbian crime boss, Big Moe. A beautiful (if only for those incredible eyes) and talented actress, her descent into low-budget fare has been sad to watch, but she seems to be having a ball here. Harris is also a standout as the boys' Haitian master, and the very pretty Herbst also makes an auspicious lead role debut. There's also a nice title theme by the director's brother, Danny Elfman and another nice score from the producer's brother, Richard Band. However, the film never really commits to what it wants to be. It is never funny enough for a comedy, scary enough for horror nor weird enough for cult.



Richard Elfman's PSYCHO riff in SHRUNKEN HEADS, flying Darris Love attacks Bodhi Elfman.

While SHRUNKEN HEADS qualifies as a misfire it, like DARK ANGEL, signals positive change at Full Moon. Instead of more sequels and more variations on already well-worn Band themes, these films mark the influx of new blood, and an attempt at something new, imaginative, and original.

OBLIVION ★★1/2

Paramount Home Video. Directed by Sam Irvin. 1995. 94 mins. Starring: Richard Joseph Paul, Jackie Swanson, Andrew Divoff, Meg Foster, Musetta Vander, Julie Newmar, George Takei.

The infusion of new directorial blood at Full Moon continues its positive influence with director Sam Irvin's OBLIVION. Wasting no time on setting up its outlandish concept of cowboys and aliens, the film

"We reused a very complex, very expensive mechanical puppet, radio controlled, from PET SHOP, redistributed the mechanics, exchanging them but not remaking them over again. Certain parts we remade because we can't always refit exactly, but the cost savings was tremendous."

To fabricate his creatures, Rappaport's shop still uses foam latex, but they would like to get into silicon; however, at the moment they just don't have the money to take into consideration the extra time and the extra fabrication skills of silicon. Said Rappaport, "We're slowly working that way, but when I talk to people over at ADI or Stan Winston's, there's a cost factor that we just can't deal with right now."

One of the films Rappaport is proudest of is DRAGONWORLD for which his shop built a 12-foot dragonhead. "The big head is versatile and does many different things," said Rappaport. We made this for \$50,000, which is very similar to the one they did in SUPER MARIO BROS, which cost a few hundred thousand dollars. That's what makes us feel good. If it's in competition with a great-looking creature, and they spent more money on it, it makes us feel good that we did a great job.

"We went to England with it. We drove it to Romania. We went back and forth with it, dealing with the logistics of moving that head around on a tractor from place to place, getting it to work in different locations."

“We made the dragon head for \$50,000, very similar to the one for SUPER MARIO BROS., which cost a few hundred thousand.”

—Supervisor Mark Rappaport—



Building the robot walking suit for Dr. Zoetrope in JOSH KIRBY, TIME WARRIOR (see page 25 for the finished prop), Full Moon's effects shop in action.

As is happening everywhere in special effects, the computer is beginning to take up the slack on some of the more complicated aspects of the job. "The computer boys put it on computer, had the whole body, not just the head and neck, flying—it was wonderful," said Rappaport of the CGI postproduction effects, also done in house. "I definitely can see that computer effects are the wave of the future. I can't deny the fact that I love the way it looked. To me, it made the Yowler that we made, the Yowler that was scripted, come to life. I

think I will appreciate that even more than the fact that I'm going to lose my job."

While Dave Allen Productions is notable for providing Full Moon with stop motion special effects, Rappaport's shop also does stop motion. "We do whatever is necessary, and how that decision is made depends on who I call up," explained Rappaport.

Allen Barlow, who has worked over at Rob Bottin's and ADI, has become the main makeup person at Full Moon. One of the reasons, according to Rappaport, is that Barlow puts in tremendous amounts of hours to keep up with all the new stuff that's going on with makeup, and also to just make his things look better. As the competition gets tougher, Barlow ends up working longer.

The effects shop often has four or five different jobs going on at once. Rappaport praised his organizers who ensure that effects artisans are working on what they most

need to rather than fabricating material that won't be needed until the film hits postproduction. They know which jobs are needed for location, which jobs to have for set or for post.

The advantage Full Moon has over other companies, Rappaport feels, is that people in his shop get a chance to contribute their ideas to the visual look of a film. They can advise the director, and sometimes insist on the best way to shoot their effects. Because they don't have all the money in the world, Full Moon directors have to give those thoughts very





Moving the full-size mechanical Yowler on location in Romania. Inset: Supervisor Mark Rappaport (r) detailing the head in the shop.

serious consideration. "The director gets to make the film, but he doesn't get to make all the decisions," said Rappaport of Full Moon's system. "If you're over at a shop like Stan Winston's or Rick's or ADI, you're very talented, but you're still only a cog."

Budgets for creature effects on Full Moon films run between \$25,000 to \$100,000, depending on the project. "We've gone up to \$150,000," said Rappaport,

David Barton makes up director Sam Irvin as Carbasas for *MAGIC ISLAND*. Below: Irvin poses with Full Moon's magic mirror design.



regarding *DRAGONWORLD*, "but any other shop would have charged \$300,000 for that set-up, if not more. We had a head and neck as expressive [as what you] saw in the brachiosauruses in *JURASSIC PARK*."

Directors at Full Moon rely heavily on Rappaport's special effects people. Full Moon directors get from 12 days to three weeks to complete principal photography. They might have the flexibility to film inserts and second unit later on, but chances are some of their schedule will involve Rappaport's input.

"You're working 16 hours a day and getting paid for 10," said Rappaport, "and you wonder why you do it, and then you see the film and you think, 'I helped the director with that, I made that happen, we worked together on that.'"

"I can't think of any big film that I worked on like *BATMAN RETURNS* that I had any input

on. They said this is how it is, you get it done. I don't care what it costs, just get it done. When I work on a big film like that, I don't personally feel like I had much to do with it, even though I worked on the mechanics and puppeteered it. Everything I did was directed by somebody else.

"Here you're directing yourself or directing with David [Allen] or with the director of the film. Here sometimes directors say, 'You've got experience, you tell me how you would do it.'" Because a lot of directors here are cutting their teeth also and hoping to move on, and they need you to help them pull it off."

Rappaport has worked as a puppeteer, a fireman, a deputy sheriff, and has a B.S. in marine biology, but likes effects work best. "This job is great because it's always different," he said. "It's sort of like being a cop. Every day is different, and that's what I liked about being a cop, except there was a lot of tragedy in that and a lot of depression. Here you always feel challenged, you always feel alive, even though you feel overworked quite often. There's still a great satisfaction in it." □

introduces us to the title locale, a seemingly standard prairie town (albeit, one constructed in Romania), which has just been usurped by the despicable outlaw, Red Eye, and his nefarious gang. With their sheriff murdered, the town's only hope lies in the sheriff's estranged son, Zack. Unfortunately, his empathic abilities make it nearly impossible for him to do violence to another, rendering him a virtual pacifist.

While the concept can withstand only the lightest of scrutiny, it's well presented in a production that, for Band, is almost lavish. Sets, costumes and visual effects by David Allen all enhance the flavor of the proceedings, as does a nice musical score from Pino Donaggio.

Working with what is probably the best cast ever assembled for a Band film, Irvin and his actors all manage to create characters that entertain well beyond their stock western archetypes. Vander is a delight as an electric-whip-cracking prairie dominatrix named Lash.

Like Quentin Tarrantino's *PULP FICTION*, Irvin likes to tap into our collective "pop" memory for conditioned reactions to many of his cast and their characters. At times Irvin piles it on too thick, but much of the film's entertaining moments come from this approach.

"On *OBLIVION* there was literally snow falling on a western town that was not called for," said effects supervisor David Allen. "They were shoveling it out of the way, putting dirt on it, and waiting for the next flurry to subside."



Director Sam Irvin's near-lavish space western entertains well beyond its stock archetypes.

PREHYSTERIA 2 ★★

Directed by Albert Band. 1995. 81 mins Starring: Kevin R Connors, Jennifer Harte, Dean Scofield, Bettye Ackerman, Larry Hankin, Alan Palo.

Virtually a remake of the first film. I watched it with my 10-year-old son, who enjoyed it. Knowing your market and meeting its demands has always been a Band strength. But like *PREHYSTERIA*, this is a blandly directed, inexpensively produced, film. And like its predecessor, it should be a major video hit that will cement Band's Moonbeam label as the leading provider of family-oriented video, after Disney. □



Lori Petty as the girl and her tank, taking on the Department of Water in 2033, after an ecological disaster has made water scarce. Below: Malcolm McDowell as the ruthless water department chief. Left: The British comic book by Jamie Hewlett that served as movie inspiration.



Rachel Talalay

By Dan Scapperotti

The world is in a mess. Again! By 2033, a massive comet striking the Earth has created an ecological disaster, reducing the planet to a desert wasteland, according to the British Tank Girl comics created by Jamie Hewlett, and Alan Martin. The comics were imported by Darkhorse Comics and published here as two four-part series. The character has now been brought to the screen by director Rachel Talalay, (*GHOST IN THE MACHINE*) released nationwide by MGM on March 24.

Talalay's film takes extensive liberties with the original Tank Girl comics. Lori Petty plays Rebecca Buck, the feisty young titular character, who might not have reached the screen at all, except for a chance present Talalay received from her stepdaughter, a set of the comics. "I thought it was just the coolest thing and I went after it," said Talalay. "I thought it was great that I was hip enough to receive it as a Christmas present."

Talalay spent a year trying to obtain the film rights. "It was a scary project for the studios," she said. "It's outrageous, with lots of sexual innuendo, this kind of pushed the envelope." The production got under way last June, filming in New Mexico and Arizona. The film is Talalay's biggest production to date. But she found that bigger only adds to your want list. "All you still ever do is compromise," she said. "A \$25 million budget isn't much for a huge action movie, when the last movie you did was \$12." But the director's biggest challenge wasn't the budget however, it was the climate. Location shooting in the desert proved to be an arduous task for cast and crew alike.

"It was hell!" Talalay admitted. "We spent the middle of the summer in a copper mine. It was physically hellish working 16 hours a day in 110 degree heat. We were always filming in some filthy dirt patch, climbing some hill in the heat, trying to keep everybody together."

The production built many of the sets in mine buildings, and also used them as backdrops for the films nefarious Water and Power Department. "These huge tin industrial buildings, with all this equipment were

TANK GIRL

on filming the cutting-edge British comic.

great looking," said Talalay. "The production also shot interiors and some blue screen in Los Angeles. The hideout of the Rippers' rag-tag resistance movement that opposes water and power, was shot in an L.A. bowling alley that had been trashed. The Rippers' battle armor was made of foam rubber. It was bare bones survival for these guys to get through a scene [in the heat]," said Talalay. "Ice-T, who plays the Ripper T-Saint, will tell you it was the worst experience of his life, next to being shot. It was horrible."

The film's title role had originally gone to Emily Lloyd, who left the project shortly after filming began. "I'm not allowed to talk about that," said Talalay. "The lawyers would kill me." The actress was quickly replaced with Petty, who had been an early contender. "I really loved Lori," Talalay said. "When it didn't work out with Emily, Lori walked in the door. I think Lori's a very talented comedienne, and I was really looking for somebody who had warmth and humor and could do the toughness. The cliched way to go with TANK GIRL would be the really tough approach. But, I wanted to make sure we kept the wacky humor and that's what Lori had. She's not afraid. Shave my head. Great! Put me in the most outrageous costumes. Great! Stick me on the end of a tank barrel. No problem. She was totally into it."

The director was also impressed with the abilities of the young actresses on the set. "Lori Petty ad-libbed all the time and she had a really funny out there sense of humor and way about her," said Talalay. "There were a lot of times when I would give her a martini and stick her in the tank and say, 'You're fighting the bad guys. Go for it.' She would run through a litany of her own jokes, and become the Tank Girl character. She brought a lot to it, and always loved being the character. I didn't have to drag the character out of her. But, some days when it was 110 degrees, I had to drag her out of her trailer."

The chief villain, Kesslee, is played by veteran Malcolm McDowell, and Talalay admitted to being a fan of the actor. "I espe-



Director Rachel Talalay, tackling the quirky comic book project on a budget of \$25 million in the Arizona desert. "I wanted to do something that was different," she said.

cially love his early movies," she said. "CLOCKWORK ORANGE influenced me a lot on this film. He really wanted to do the part. He thought it was a very smart, interesting villain that gave him the opportunity to do some really fun stuff."

The film boasts some animation inserts that may seem out of place in a live action format. "It originally got added because I just couldn't do some of the wonderful things with a physical tank, that I loved so much about the comic, and stay within our budget," said Talalay. "You can't put a real tank on the pinnacle of a building, or make it fly through the air and turn upside down. I was really missing that. I wanted to include that essence in the movie, so we added this animated sequence. And, we worked it in in such a way that it made sense, in a twisted kind of way."

While the characters of Tank Girl, Sub Girl and Jet Girl are from the comic

pages, the film is a totally original story, including the introduction of the nefarious Water and Power Department. Also taken from the comics are the Rippers, the strange, half man, half kangaroo revolutionary denizens of the desert, who act as an underground movement bent on harassing Kesslee's Storm Troopers. "It's always hard work to put people in rubber suits with huge animatronic ears and big tails," said Talalay of the Rippers. "It's not insurmountable. You're still working with actors. We based our characters on actors. It wasn't like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, where if you don't look at what color they're wearing, then they all look the same. We made Ice-T's makeup around Ice-T's look." Talalay had an active hand in developing the script. When she hired the actors, their personalities were based on the personalities they wanted in the script. They then designed the makeup based on the faces of the actors, with the additional personality traits that they were trying to portray. "Every time these eight guys walked onto the set, 16 to 24 support people came in with them," said Talalay. "To run their ears, to run their tails, to put their clothes on. That's exhausting. You find yourself asking who's Ice-T's ears, and suddenly, out of the woodwork, some guy with a little radio control thing raises his hand. It's incredibly time consuming, Stan Winston just did a brilliant job getting all those characters in there."

Despite the futuristic nature of the film, the special effects are basically visual effects, composed mostly of miniature work. "We're not reinventing the wheel here," said Talalay modestly. "No incredibly complicated new technology. A lot of miniature work, a lot of fires. Creating this devastated world called for a lot of high tech machinery and the flyers which are like futuristic carrier jump jets. At the very end, we have some holographic technology that I don't want to talk about too much. The essence of the movie is not inventing new technology, it's just using the effects to make stuff cooler. It's nowhere near as complicated as creating the killer in the computer in GHOST IN THE MACHINE." □

Lepreec

A mixture of comedy, blood and gore in

By F. Colin Kingston

Fans of the LEPRECHAUN movie series can expect a little something extra in LEPRECHAUN 3—comedy. Director Brian Trenchard-Smith (THE QUEST, DEAD END DRIVE IN, NIGHT OF THE DEMONS II) noted, "I looked at the other LEPRECHAUN pictures and, while I thought they were fine pieces of work in their own right, they lacked enough Leprechaun. We are going to try and give the people more of what they enjoy." Trimark plans to open the new sequel in April.

British actor Warwick Davis (RETURN OF THE JEDI) is back for his third star turn as the Leprechaun and is pleased with the direction this film is taking. "The Leprechaun in this movie is seen in a totally different light," said Davis. "He's in a casino among the general public and you see their reactions to him."

Noted director Trenchard-Smith, "This is a bizarre opportunity to bring a sense of fun to the LEPRECHAUN concept. I thought I'd make it more of a comedy-horror than a horror-comedy."

John Gatlin (WITCHBOARD II) portrays a college student who loses his tuition money in Las Vegas. To win his money back Gatlin wishes on the Leprechaun's gold and finds himself slowly turning into one of the dwarfish gremlins. "I think the whole concept is outstanding and this is nothing against the other movies," said Gatlin. "But this one has the elements the other ones didn't have—from comedy to two monsters as opposed to one."

Davis said he also enjoyed the emphasis toward comedy. "During the film [the Leprechaun] gets to transmit his image onto a television set and

"This is a bizarre opportunity to bring a sense of fun to the series," noted director Brian Trenchard-Smith. "I make it more of a comedy-horror."



Michael Callahan as Mitch, the sleazy Las Vegas casino owner, who gets done in by his malfunctioning sexual gratification robot, effects by Gabe Bartalos.

performs a series of commercials mimicking actual American commercials. He does the typical sort of accident lawyer commercial, a televangelist, a shopping-channel type of salesman and a psychic lady. In all those sequences the Leprechaun changes his costume to suit each character. I was able to speak in a totally different voice, but I still had the makeup on. I enjoyed doing that."

Magic also plays an important part in the film in the form of John DeMita as Fazio, the world's worst magician, on stage at the Lucky Shamrock Casino. "In the story, if you get a single shilling, you are allowed a single wish," said DeMita. "Unfortunately, as

things usually go in these films, anybody who gets that wish then gets the wrath of the Leprechaun as he tries to get back his gold. My wish is to become the greatest magician in the world. I'm given that for about...oh...five minutes." Fazio gets sawed in half for real.

DeMita, who practiced magic as a hobby when he was a kid, seems perfectly cast for the role, but after his audition he didn't think he would get the part. "When I read for the part I was told to bring some tricks in. I did the reading and I was very, very happy. But when I had to do the magic I got the worst case of flop sweat I had in my life. It was like Albert Brooks in BROADCAST

NEWS. I thought I'd blown it at that point. Then I read the script again and realized, 'Wait. He's supposed to be a bad magician.'"

Part of the success of the LEPRECHAUN series must be attributed to makeup artist Gabe Bartalos who has been with the series since its beginning and helped design the look of the Leprechaun character. Noted Bartalos, "I kept trying to read them in the meetings. What was it they [the producers] were looking for? I did several sculptures and submitted them, but I still wasn't getting any signal from them. Finally I said, 'Forget it, let me just do what I would want to see.' I went back and did this big, crazed, exaggerated mug with big ears, big nose and stuff. I took photographs of it and went down there and they said, 'Holy smokes, that's it.'"

"Obviously once I'm done doing the makeup, Warwick does the work, but it is flattering to me that I haven't been asked to change the character too much. They were nice enough to ask me back for parts 2 and 3 as well. That's made it really rewarding."

Of his creation, Bartalos noted, "The only thing I was keeping in mind was that they were probably spending some money on the name actor, Mr. Davis, so let's exploit his acting features. Let's put what they pay for on the screen. Let's make this makeup, as theatrical as it is, still very mobile and enable him to do his full expressions though it."

Bartalos had nothing but praise for Davis. "He learned what he has to do to make the makeup read what the camera needs to see. That's really important because some people get smothered under it and just sit there. He [Davis] really worked with it. He studied the films."

After three films Bartalos

hauñ 3

search of the elusive boxoffice pot o' gold.

and Davis have developed a good working relationship. It takes approximately three hours to apply Davis' Leprechaun makeup and another 35 minutes to take it off. The two have become good friends. Noted Bartalos, "I was joking with his wife Samantha that she has to vie for time now. I probably know him better than she does!"

Bartalos also supervised the film's special effects with assistants Mike McCarty, Clay Martinez and Sam DeLatore. "They were the core people in helping us achieve some of the sophisticated effects such as the Lorretta character whose boobs and butt expand and explode," said Bartalos. Other effects include a robot woman who is a sexual partner to the sleazy casino owner, Mitch, that "basically turns into just a bizarre mechanical anatomy of a woman," said Bartalos. Naturally, LEPRECHAUN 3 also has its share of ripped-off ears and bitten-off toes.

With Gatlin's character slowly turning into a Leprechaun throughout the film, Bartalos kept busy. Noted Gatlin, "I have four stages of makeup. The fourth stage takes about an hour and a half to two hours. But often when we were filming I'd go from stage four back to normal Scott. That's a lot of time in the chair to get the makeup off and go back to regular straight makeup. It's tough, but that's what made the role challenging."

The role presented other challenges as well. Said Gatlin smiling, "As an actor you sometimes do research. If you're going to play a baseball player in a movie you go out and hit baseballs. But if you're gonna play a leprechaun you're on your own. I am really excited about this film because of the range of the character. I get to play a normal, funny, cocky young kid and a



Warwick Davis in makeup by Gabe Bartalos as the Leprechaun, horror played for laughs against the glitzy setting of Las Vegas. Inset: Davis in the makeup chair for a daily three-hour makeover.



monster all at the same time."

LEPRECHAUN 3 was filmed non-union to save money and Australian director Trenchard-Smith noted some similarities between Australian and American filmmaking. "Working non-union in America is sort of like working regular in Australia," he said. "There is a young enthusiasm that powers the non-union industry here. People are grateful and delighted to be working on a film, even for slave wages. I've had a fairly successful run with low-budget pictures all my life. Many of them are

quite profitable. That has kept me pegged in the low-budget area."

That isn't to say there aren't some problems now and again for the Australian-born filmmaker. "You might say that Australia and America are two countries divided by a common language. If I want to erase something from a page of notes that I've been writing in pencil and I call across the office for a 'rubber,' this causes some concern in an American office. In an Australian office they immediately pass me an eraser."

Asked about the budget for

LEPRECHAUN 3, Trenchard-Smith replied, "That is a state secret, but you can draw your own conclusions with 14 days of main unit shooting and two days of second unit. They scaled back to the barest minimum for the picture to be operational, but we've managed to work within that, and we are on schedule and inside our contingency."

Budget constraints notwithstanding, Trenchard-Smith is pleased with the result. "To create Las Vegas and shoot seven and a half pages a day on a regular basis, day and night with a lot of physical action is hard. We think we've managed to get a bit of style into the picture due to the excellent cinematography of our two cameramen," said Trenchard-Smith.

One of the greatest challenges for the director was the film's climax which takes place in the showroom of the Lucky Shamrock. "Doing the climax in one night involved the Leprechaun sawing the magician in half with a chainsaw, the audience panicking, all 60 people flooding out of the room, and our heroes rushing off the stage—one of them wear-

ing full-scale prosthetic makeup because he too is becoming a Leprechaun. There is also a battle of magic and wits between Scott [Gatlin] and the Leprechaun [Davis]. That was a tall order in one day. We did 56 setups that day but it's not my record. I did 66 in one day on MISSION IMPOSSIBLE."

Summed up Trenchard-Smith, "What the Leprechaun does is let peoples' greed get the better of them and that enables him to get them." Time will tell whether or not LEPRECHAUN 3 hits the jackpot. □

Space Truckers

Director Stuart Gordon previews his outrageous low-budget outer space epic.

By Dennis Fischer

SPACE TRUCKERS, a \$17 million science fiction epic written by former *National Lampoon* editor Ted Mann (CIVIL WARS, NYPD BLUE) and directed by Stuart Gordon (RE-ANIMATOR, ROBOT JOX) is set 200 years in the future, about an independent trucker named John Canyon who has a little Pachyderm rig, a combination truck and space shuttle. Canyon hauls cargo to colonies from one end of the solar system to the other. "The picture begins shooting in April and should be done by the end of '95," said Gordon.

In the beginning of the movie, Canyon is hauling a cargo of genetically engineered square pigs, 146 containers stretching one-half mile in space. The pigs are square so they can be stacked and stored more easily. Canyon works for Interpork, and he is late with his shipment because his little truck is not fast enough.

Because he's late, Canyon gets blackballed by Transgen, the corporation that has a virtual monopoly on all things connected to the space colonies. In order for him to survive, he has to agree to take a black market load, a mysterious shipment, to Earth, and he has to get it there in three days. He agrees to take along his girlfriend, Cindy, the waitress from Terminus, the orbiting truck stop, and his partner named Mike Pucci, a trucker in training.

According to director Stuart Gordon,



Gordon, in his office on the Disney lot, surrounded by the designs of SPACE TRUCKERS, a \$17 million production, financed independently, ready to roll.

SPACE TRUCKERS is about "the colonization of the solar system. The idea [is] that Earth is overpopulated and the resources are depleted, and so it's necessary now to set up colonies on other worlds and to terraform them. The company that has helped with all of this is a huge corporation called Transgen, which is a genetic engineering company, and they have a monopoly on just about all the products and shipping involved in space travel."

In order to reach Earth in three days, Canyon has to leave the regular space lanes and enter what's called the "Scum Cluster," an asteroid belt that is very dangerous because it's where all the hijackers hang out. Said Gordon, "This journey is the ride of his life and the mystery is exactly what's in those containers."

While the initial draft of the script spanned the galaxies, after researching the subject, Gordon and Mann decided to eschew the STAR WARS/STAR TREK approach in favor of something more realistic. By restricting their story to the solar system and making it as realistic as possible, they incorporate the kind of scientific touches that haven't been seen since 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY while building to the kind of thrills that charged ALIEN to such a high intensity.

To get the look they wanted, the filmmakers turned to a talented pool of artists: Ron Cobb (CONAN THE BARBARIAN; ALIEN); Bruce McCall, best

known for his work in *National Lampoon*, especially his weird vehicle designs e.g. "Golf Carts of the S.S.," Berni Wrightson (creator of Swamp Thing) who has been working on the creature designs, and Simon Murton who did all the conceptual designs for Gordon's FORTRESS and is the production designer on the picture.

"It's an amazing group," said Gordon. "We've been doing extensive preproduction, doing conceptual artwork, storyboarding the picture, and getting a handle on the effects."

Noted co-producer and scriptwriter Mann, "We've been able to get foreign equity investors to come in without stars attached because of the names of the artists and the quality of the work. They'll be overjoyed to see good actors in there and



Production design by comic artist Bernie Wrightson. Captain Macanudo, a rebuilt space hijacker gets disarmed by Cindy, a plucky truckstop waitress. Below: The hive of a squad of Bio-Mech warriors.





Space trucker John Canyon approaches Terminus Station, an orbiting truck stop. The film is designed by Simon Murton, who worked with Gordon on FORTRESS.

we'd like to get them, but that's not why they bought it. They like the story and the way it looks."

The film endeavors to take the familiar and project it into the future. Canyon's Pachyderm rig is like a space-going Mac truck. In zero gravity, it can haul endless amounts of cargo. "Our story is about blue collar working guys," said Gordon. "These are not astronauts or warriors. It's got to be simple enough for somebody to be able to learn to drive it fairly easily. It's got a steering and gearshift and brakes, all of which operate retro-rockets rather than conventional machinery."

One of the important locations in the film is Terminus, a truck stop in space which is rife with the modular sprawl and overcommercialization of space. Terminus does more than resurrect the idea of Howard Johnson's.

"One of the things that they never deal with in space movies is the fact that there is no gravity unless you create it," observes Gordon. "In the drive into Terminus in the opening scene, [John]'s squirting some

mustard on a hot dog, but he squirts it above the hot dog and brings it up to meet the mustard. Within his cab and within his truck, there is no gravity."

In the tradition of Stanley Kubrick, the filmmakers sought help from scientists to accurately depict the future. "I actually asked NASA about zero gravity toilets and they sent me more information than I ever wanted to know about how it's accomplished," said Gordon. "It's pretty disgusting stuff. You need gravity for most of your biological processes, and if you don't have gravity for too long, your bones stop growing. You develop a calcium deficiency. So you have to create artificial gravity if you're in space for any duration of time. You really need gravity for your body to work against, your heart and for everything."

"We came up with the idea that one of the reasons you go to this truck stop is not to just get a cup of coffee, but you go to get a good night's sleep and you also go there for a few g's of gravity. One of the designers came up with the slogan, 'Stop here for

a few z's and a few g's.'" The centripetal force created by the turning station keeps the space travelers from growing weak, a concept Gordon said was inspired by NASA research.

The wildest designs are saved for Macanudo, whom Gordon described as a "kind of the pegleg Captain Hook pirate taken to extremes, a cyborg who builds machine replacement parts for those he has lost." "In terms of its budget," said Mann, "every studio that read the script said this is \$40 million. We said, 'No, it's not.'" Supervising effects are Tom Brigham and Paul Gentry, who worked on FORTRESS for Gordon.

Noted Gordon, "Our budget is \$16 1/2 million, which is the largest budget I've ever had to work with, but for an effects picture like this one it's really a very small budget. This movie is creating the world 200 years from now, going from one end of the solar system to the other.

"You always start out with wonderful grandiose dreams, and then you deal with the reality of the budget. The people involved in this project have come up through the ranks of low-budget movies, and so a budget like the one we have is a very healthy one."

Gordon plans to do most of the effects in camera and do things on the set with mechanical effects as much as possible. He will only use an optical when there's no other way around it. "In a way, I think it makes the movie more believable," he said, "because you can actually interact with the effect; it's not like you're looking at a blue screen and somebody telling you Godzilla is going to be there eventually. The more of that that you can do, the better.

"Oftentimes you find solutions that are even better because you're forced to be creative, use your imagination, and pick and

Biomechanical warriors destroy the Transgen command center, a corporate plot to take power.





The Pachyderm Space Truck, hauling cubic pork, overrun by the alien warriors. The film has been scripted by former *National Lampoon* editor Ted Mann.

choose your effects. What are the ones that you really have to have? I think it's a good discipline for the film.

"I see so many effects picture where they haven't really worked out the concepts. When you sit down and think about it, it doesn't really make a lot of sense. Or the script hasn't really had the chance to be honed. They've spent tons of money on effects.

"What I realized over the years is that the best special effects in the world will not carry a movie. What really is most important is the story and the actors, being able to care about the people and believe it. If you can do that, then an audience will accept very simple effects as long as they are not atrocious, as long as they're not seeing strings and rubber hams and so on. As long as the effects do not pull them out of the scene, they will be much more willing to go along with the ride, whereas if they're not involved, it doesn't matter how good the effects are."

Mann believes that people will be able to relate to Canyon because they know what an independent trucker is like, how hard it is for them to make a living, the sacrifices they make to retain their independence. "The work out there will be done by the same people who do the work here, who take risks in their daily lives to make other people rich and put food on their tables."

In talking to scientists at NASA about terraforming, Gordon learned that genetic engineering is going to be an essential part of terraforming. "One of the things we learned is that Mars has an atmosphere that is very rich in nitrogen, which we can't breathe but plants can," said Gordon. "Plants convert the nitrogen into oxygen, which would make it a very livable place, but the problem is that a plant cannot survive on Mars because it's so cold."

Additionally, plants need water, of

“This is about the colonization of the solar system. Earth is overpopulated, its resources depleted, so it's necessary.”

—Director Stuart Gordon—



The Terminus Diner, rotating to create artificial gravity, a rest stop for space workers who need doses of gravity to maintain their health and sanity.

which there is a shortage on Mars. "One of the ideas is that they could melt the polar ice caps on Mars by painting them black so that they will absorb sunlight," said Gordon. "Possibly even putting micro-organisms in the paint, which would create life on the planet. And you could genetically engineer plants that were capable of surviving that kind of climate. Ultimately you would end up with a planet that could support human life as well.

"The idea that the genetic engineering company could become the most powerful corporation in terms of the colonization of space suddenly made a great deal of sense, and it was just a central part of our story.

"The secret cargo that John Canyon, our hero, is carrying turns out to be genetically engineered warriors that are being sent by the corporation to take over the Earth. He is unknowingly transporting them like a Trojan horse because they can't use their own trucks. It would be too clear that they are planning this coup d'état. The story ultimately becomes this ordinary working guy having to save the Earth."

The space truckers find what looks like a gunrack with little tubes that connect the guns to blobs of what looks like bubblegum which turn out to be genetically engineered warriors that grow onto the guns. The film's artists did a whole series of designs of these half human, insectoid warriors, the idea being that insects are the most durable creation on Earth and these things have exoskeletons which allow them to exist in space without spacesuits.

"A lot of the ideas are funny ideas," said Gordon about the film's design, "but they're believable ideas. People will see this movie and think yeah, I think that's the way it could actually be 200 years from now. I think it's going to present a view of space movies like no other. It's a very fresh look at space." □

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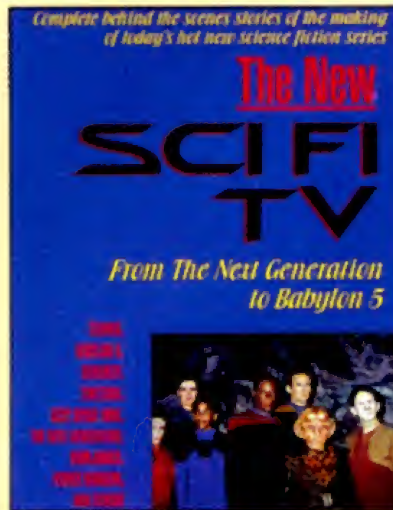
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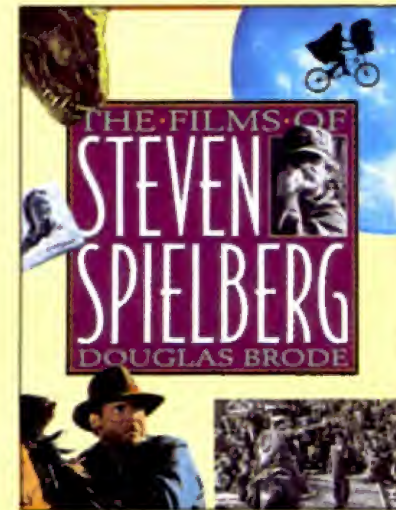
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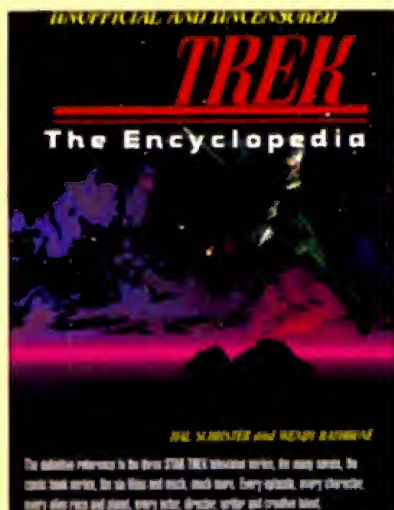
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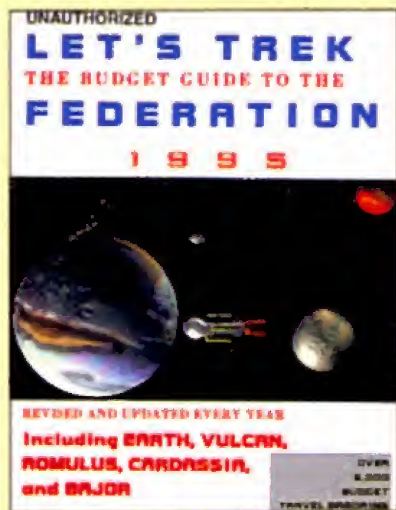
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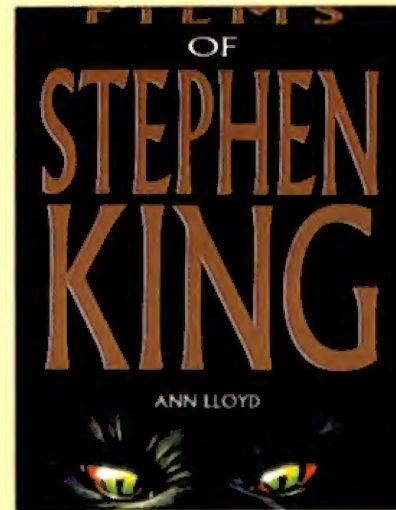
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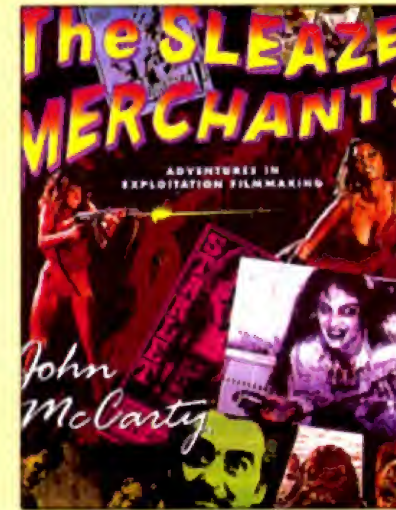
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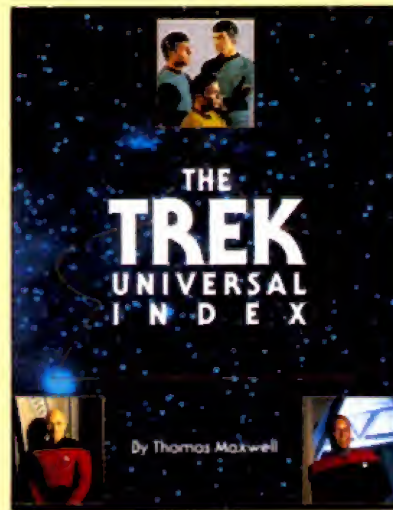
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FILM RATINGS

- Must See
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Poor

THE BIRDS II: LAND'S END

Directed by Alan Smithee. A MCA-Universal release. 87 mins. With: Brad Johnson, Chelsea Field, James Naughton, Tippi Hedren, Jan Rubes.

Needless sequel to the Hitchcock classic takes place 30 years later at Gull Island and ignores the apocalyptic implications of the original's ending. Ted and Mary Hocken (Brad Johnson and Chelsea Field) relocate their troubled family to Gull Island, where the events of Bodega Bay begin to repeat themselves, sans the flair, style and shocks that Hitchcock brought to the original. An unhappy Rick Rosenthal (HALLOWEEN II; BAD BOYS) replaced his name with the Smithee pseudonym, but the mystery remains why he thought Ken and Jim Wheat and Robert Eisele's uninspired screenplay was worth doing in the first place. Original cast member Hedren is wasted in an unremarkable bit part that only points up the film's inadequacies compared to its predecessor. With no good story, acting, scares or style, there's no reason to waste your time with this one. ○ **Dennis Fischer**

BODY PUZZLE

Directed by "Larry Louis" (Lamberto Baba). Released by Triboro Video. 9/94. 100 mins. Italian dubbed into English. With: Joanna Pacula, Tomas Arana, Francois Montagut.

Italian director Lamberto Baba, hiding behind a pseudonym, treads ground well worn by Herschell Gordon Lewis and, more recently, by BODY PARTS (1991). Joanna Pacula plays a classic victim. First her brother dies, then her husband. Then someone steals Hubby's body from the graveyard and starts killing people and leaving hunks of them in her fridge. About the only original idea is that the killer, whom the audience sees immediately, puts on a Walkman and listens to "Night on Bald Mountain" while committing the murders. This is the kind of movie which should go directly to MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATRE because it's so unintentionally funny to begin with. Although the corpses are often in pieces, the coroner feels it necessary to point out that the bodies have been mutilated. Particularly humorous is the sight of the killer underwater, knife in hand, aiming for his latest victim. A murder which takes place in front of a class of blind children could have been memorable, but Bava doesn't seem to have inherited any visual flair from his celebrated father.

○ **Judith Harris**

FAUST

Written and directed by Jan Svankmajer. Zeitgeist Films. 10/94. 97 mins. With: Petr Cepek.

A hollow-shelled egg appearing in a loaf of bread unleashes the wrath of the devil. A mound of clay goes through a series of transformations, ending as a middle-aged man's head atop a baby's



NIGHT OF THE DEMONS 2, makeup effects supervised by Steve Johnson.

body, a ferocious devil's head appearing and then being disguised by a human image. In the background, red puppets pound and beat white ones, littering the floor with shattered ceramic dust.

Using excerpts from various interpretations of Faust through the centuries (Marlowe, Goethe, Grabbe and various folk tales), master Czeck animator-filmmaker Jan Svankmajer integrates live-action drama with puppets, clay and three-dimensional animation in a surrealistic, deconstructionist reading of the perennial story of a pact with the devil, this time as an Everyman drama about testing the limits of knowledge vs. acceptance of a kind of conformist, institutionalized happiness.

The multi-layered world of Svankmajer's films is so virtuosic and original, its mere style is enough to leave us in a state of awestruck delight. While it may be true that Svankmajer's art works better in shorter forms, at least his glum view of the world provides one caveat: no world capable of producing such prodigious richness of invention could ever be dull enough to sustain a meaningless despair.

●●●● **James M. Faller**

HEAVENLY CREATURES

Directed by Peter Jackson. Miramax. 11/94. 98 mins. With: Melanie Lynskey, Kate Winslet, Sara Peirse, Diana Kent.

Peter Jackson, whose splatter comedies BAD TASTE and DEAD ALIVE were as brilliantly sustained and ultimately serious as any one-note comedy could ever be, has moved from gleeful excess to disciplined true-life drama with equally impressive results. What gives the film's true-life crime story its brilliance and distinction is its decision to expand the material beyond conventional views of the case. At the realistic level, it does this by building a secondary case against circumstance, showing how every event that happened involving murderers Pauline Parker and Juliet Hume or their families, while innocent and harmless in itself, led inevitably to the crime they commit, leaving virtually no other possibility. Even

more impressively, Jackson makes the fantasy world the girls inhabit come alive, using Plasticine and fully embodied clay figures and three-dimensional animation in such proximity to the real events in the film that we can't help but see the girls' view of events being hopelessly skewed by romantic delusion.

The acting, particularly that by the teenage leads, is extraordinarily intense and convincing. Along with the expert and inspired production team, they add grace, authority and conviction to what is already an impressive, intelligent production. But it is director Jackson who deserves the most credit for success. What is often overlooked amidst the splattered body parts and mad invention of his first two films is the basic sobriety of his point of view and style. His films are out-of-this-world, but the director persists in treating them as normal. Applying the same techniques to a fact-based story, he has bridged the gap between fantasy and reality, and shown the seamlessness of the web that unites the two.

●●●● **James M. Faller**

THE KINGDOM (RIGET)

Directed by Lars von Trier. Script by Tomas Gislason. Lars von Trier. 1/95. 279 mins. In Danish with English subtitles. With: Ernest Hugo Haregard, Kirsten Rolffes, Ghita Norby, Soren Pilmark.

Danish TV miniseries co-written and directed by Lars von Trier, who gave us the enthralling, visually arresting ZENTROPA. Each of four parts is longer than an hour, but it's an investment of time well worth taking. Lacks the brilliant photography and striking images of ZENTROPA, and also betrays its TV originals with its overuse of closeups. These quibbles aside, this is a riveting work of great originality, brimming with atmosphere, humor and ideas.

THE KINGDOM is the name of a hospital. All the characters are hospital staff and patients. This is chiefly a story of an old woman (Kirsten Rolffes) who has spent a lifetime feigning illnesses. Also a medium, she investigates and tries to exorcise the spirit of a child murdered in the hospital.

The narrative is full of bizarre inci-

dents. A patient who is allergic to anesthesia is put under by hypnotism, and makes his surgery team uneasy by humming throughout his brain operation. Perhaps the most original touch is to use two of the hospital dishwashers to recap and explain to an audience what is going on. What is remarkable is this pair is played by two young adults with Downs Syndrome. Their cheerful attitudes and sweet faces belie the wisdom which spills from their lips, as we realize they are the only two characters who really know what's going on.

There are traditional horror movie elements woven into the plot. One unwed nurse (Brigitte Raabjerg) finds herself pregnant and, although she should only be 14 weeks along, she is ready to deliver. One of the young interns (Peter Mygind) plays a ghoulish practical joke with a corpse who vaguely resembles him, and later has NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD-type cannibalism dreams under the influence of a drug being tested in the sleep lab. There's plenty of scope for humor as well. Especially when a visiting government official decides on a two a.m. tour and comes across an exorcism, an abortion and hanky panky in the sleep lab.

At the shock ending of the fourth episode is the title: TO BE CONTINUED. I hope so.

●●● **Judith Harris**

NIGHT OF THE DEMONS 2

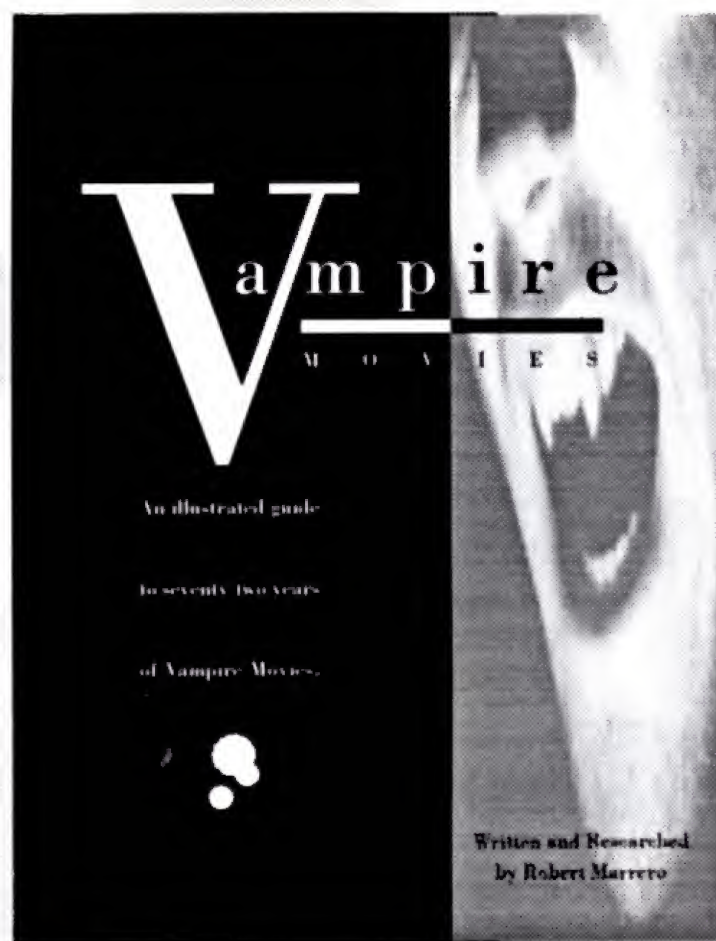
Directed by Brian Trenchard-Smith. Script by Joe Augustyn. Blue Rider Films. 12/94. 100 mins. With: Cristi Harris, Darin Heames, Bobby Jacoby, Merle Kennedy, Amelia Kinkade.

A ho-hum sequel that makes the 1988 low-budget original seem a lot better in retrospect. Nearly an hour goes by before anything interesting happens to hopelessly cliched cartoonish characters. One can hardly wait for them to get

Jan Svankmajer's FAUST, a mound of clay transforms into a middle-aged man's head on a baby's body.



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bumped off so they return as demons in the usual toothsome, mottled makeup. Makeup designer Steve Johnson comes up with an interesting variation on his lipstick in the breast gag from the first film, but his best effect is a snake woman which is highly reminiscent of the Harryhausen *SINBAD* puppet. Although the characters appear out of left field, making no dramatic sense, the makeup is sufficiently arresting that the character deserves a movie of its own, instead of being tacked on at the tail end of this drab affair.

Jennifer Rhodes plays Sister Gloria, rather an anachronism in this day and age—a Catholic nun who not only wears a habit, but goes around brandishing a yardstick and making life miserable for horny boarding school teenagers. When the action finally gets rolling in this meandering plot, she girds herself like Rambo and comes out swinging her rosary beads.

● Judith Harris

PHANTASM III: LORD OF THE DEAD

Directed and written by Don Coscarelli. Pay-per-view TV. 12/94. 90 mins. With: Reggie Bannister, A. Michael Baldwin, Bill Thornbury, Gloria Lynne Henry, Kevin Connors, Angus Scrimm.

Reggie (Bannister) and Mike (Baldwin) are back for a third go-round with the Tall Man (Angus Scrimm). While not a complete rehash of the 1979 original as was the first sequel, this third trip to the well comes up pretty dry in terms of plot and character development or expanding on the special effects concepts. While the first film managed a kind of hallucinogenic dreamlike disorientation, this time around it's merely disjointed. Some of the fight scenes are just plain laughable (which may have been the intent), and there's precious few scares. In particular, Scrimm looks pretty old and tired and, at any rate, has been given too much screen time over the three films to be much of a threat any longer.

● Judith Harris

REBOOT

Directed by Richard Zondag. ABC-TV. 1/95. 30 mins. With the voices of: Michael Ben Ye, Kathleen Barr, Jesse Moss, Tony Jay.

If you're bored with the turgid Earth 2 and drowning in *SEAQUEST*, **REBOOT** is the perfect antidote. This exciting science fiction adventure series features awesome 3-D CG animation and wonderful, witty scripts. More amazing is that the characters are totally digital, except for their voices, and it's stunning how lifelike are their gestures and expressions. In fact, they are better actors than most "real" TV performers.

The adventures take place in Mainframe City, a massive computerized reality, involving a cast of very engaging characters: Bob, the guardian; his friend and owner of Mainframe, Dot; her brother Enzo; the villain Megabyte, who has bad file servers everywhere and is incompetently aided by Mack and Slash, two not very bright robots; the other villain Hexadecimal, evil females and an assortment of quirky background characters.

Created in Vancouver by a team of British and Canadian animators, the ABC series on Saturday mornings is on YTV Canada prime time three nights a week. A **REBOOT** movie is in the works with major Hollywood studios showing an interest. This is a series

worth opening a vidwindow to see.

●●● Tim Hammell

SPACE GHOST: COAST TO COAST

Executive producer: Mike Lazzo. The Cartoon Network. 3/94. 15 mins. With: Kevin Meany, Bob Denver, Judy Tenuta.

Hanna-Barbera has always been a touchstone for Post-Modernists, so watching the custodians of the HB oeuvre trying to gain some additional Po-Mo cachet for the creators of *HUCKLEBERRY HOUND* and *THE JETSONS* provides, at best, a singular kind of entertainment. The Cartoon Network's attempt here to turn the tacky, mid-'60s superhero into a cynical, David Letterman-style talk show host isn't quite the fin de siècle hoot it so desperately wants to be.

The usual suspects turn up on *Space Ghost's* vid-screen to trade quips with the semi-animated host (it looked like the producers have based the entire series on about 15 seconds of the old cartoon show): Kevin Meany, Susan Powter, a fair chunk of the cast of *GILLIGAN'S ISLAND*. What we get on-screen suggests that either the producers are so far out of it that there's no hope for them, or they're so ahead of the rest of us that it'll take two generations for this show to find its audience. It all exerts a car crash, you-want-to-look-away-but-you-can't kind of pull: "Did you know that Russell rhymes with muscle?" the Ghost-man asks of Russell "The Professor" Johnson, a propos of nothing. "Which one are you," Johnson shoots back. "Beavis or Butt-Head?" At this point, you wouldn't be blamed for thinking that the whole thing would be hilarious if only you were just a little more stoned. Great theme by the late Sonny Sharrock. Add a dot if industrial-strength irony is your life's-blood.

● Dan Persons

STAR TREK: VOYAGER

Directed by Winrich Kolbe. Script by Michael Piller & Jeri Taylor. UPN. 1/94. 2 hrs. With: Kate Mulgrew, Robert Beltran, Roxann Biggs-Dawson, Jennifer Lien, Robert Duncan McNeill.

STAR TREK: VOYAGER got off to a more energetic start than the deadly dull two-hour opener of *DEEP SPACE 9*, and included several action sequences reminiscent of old-time cliffhanger serials. Though created without direct input of the late Gene Roddenberry, the latest *STAR TREK* pilot still managed to be the umpteenth version of his favorite plot in which man meets God. God being, as usual, a member of an advanced civilization who misguidedly uses technology to thwart the development of an entire species. Also derivative is this entity's simulation of a homespun community (unsuccessfully) to lull the crew's suspicions: some of us have read *The Martian Chronicles*, among other sources. It's difficult to picture the elfin Genevieve Bujold, who bailed out as Captain, but Kate Mulgrew doesn't seem all that compelling, either. Patrick Stewart's Jean-Luc Picard is sorely missed. Clearly the best part of the whole shebang is the opening credits, which looks like a demo reel for state-of-the-art computer-generated effects and is not saddled with ponderous music as is *DEEP SPACE 9*. In all, a debut promising enough to tempt even non-Trekkers to tune in next week.

●● Judith Harris

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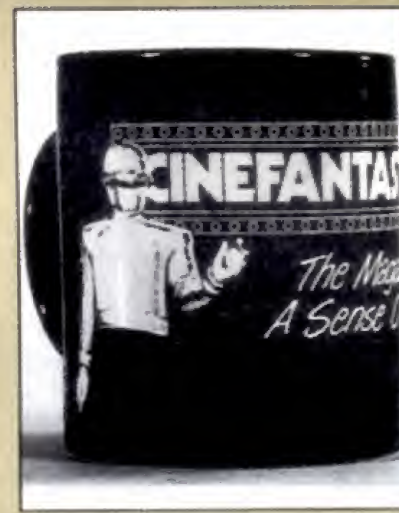
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CASPER

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Whipstaff Manor? Or is it something else, what with that laboratory buried stories underneath the manor, a laboratory whose most prominent feature is a device portentously named "The Lazarus?"

In Silberling's view, all these disparate elements will meld together to form what, for an audience, will be a satisfying whole. "I'm proudest of its sense of humanity, its sense of humor and its sense of emotion. I think we ended up creating performances that nobody will remember as computer-generated, but as genuine, pleasurable, moving performances. Weirdly enough, in the midst of its humor and otherwise, it deals a lot with grieving. Our two, live-action leads are getting over the emotional hurt of having lost a mother, and Casper's obviously in that state himself. I love the picture's humanity and the small moments that you can have, even in a canvas that's that large."

And what about having for your lead a character whose name, in its prior incarnations, has become synonymous with all that's soft, weak and, well, wimpy? Laughed Silberling, "I said to Steven, 'I gotta be honest; my memories of Casper are few and

not exactly positive. I remember him as just this kind of little, glowy wimp-ball." To me, the only reason to do this is if you can take people's expectations of that and kind of turn them on their side. Have fun with a character who, if he's been dead for a hundred years, probably has at least some sort of contemporary sensibility, because he's had to be dead for so long and gone through so many different ages.

"Steven totally went for it. So we have a guy who, instead of being a little seven or eight year old, is actually like an adolescent or pre-adolescent. He's probably a bit Puckish and got an attitude. His arrangement is kind of a Cinderella situation where he's stuck at home with three loutish, obnoxious uncles, who are also ghosts. I said, 'You can't make him a victim. Let's make it interesting, let's make it a guy who likes to have the last laugh on his uncles.' I think people are going to be a little surprised when then see the movie. The core of the character, the idea of a ghost who can't make a friend is still true, but instead of it always being weepy-mopey, you know why he can't make a friend: he scares the bejeezus out of everybody.

"Listen, when Christina Ricci

and her father arrive at the mansion and move in, and Christina tracks through the mansion and just like Goldilocks picks Casper's bedroom, it's great. Casper hasn't presented himself to her, but she flops back on this wrought-iron bed and the kid rolls out into the hallway just stricken and says, 'There's a girl...on my bed... YESSSS!!' It's a different Casper.

CGI

continued from page 42

"The next generation of computers won't have a keyboard," said programmer Chris Biggs. "You'll talk to them and they'll talk back to you. Instead of physically typing in something you'll just speak the words, and instead of having a mouse, you'll just use your finger and point. Just like in STAR TREK, they have voice recognition now, but you must say the word over and over again using the same inflection."

Just because Full Moon uses low-end gear, doesn't mean they wouldn't like the more expensive digital toys, Gentry commented: "I'd be a fool if I didn't say I wouldn't love to have SGI Onyx galore and plenty of FLAME, SOFTIMAGE, FLINT, MATA-DOR, whatever, to work with. But it works against my low-budget

approach for Full Moon, a company which needs to watch the bottom line very closely. The price we pay is not being exactly state-of-the-art, but the tools available to do this stuff inexpensively are here now. We're just driving digital Volkswagen Bugs, while others are driving Ferraris. We still both get to where we want to go."

Noted Biggs, "Being cutting edge, like ILM, does have a hefty price tag. Eventually we'll have what ILM's got in their lap right now. In about two or three years we could have it sitting on our desktops for a fraction of the cost. They're spending millions, we'll spend a couple grand!"

BATMAN FOREVER

continued from page 5

son or two-people stories—THE CLIENT is a huge ensemble piece. I'm very comfortable with that; I like the ensembles.

"I think it makes it interesting for the audience, because every time you cut to a scene, something else is going on. I had ensemble casts before—large ensemble casts of young, beautiful people—so that's very comfortable territory for me. I've always been very lucky to have great casts. But you'll tell me whether it works or not."

LETTERS

HE'S DEAD, CHARLES

I was disappointed with the way Kirk's death was handled in *GENERATIONS* [26:2]. None of us disputed that death is a constant we'll all experience, but *STAR TREK* indulges us with the chance to imagine what it would be like to "bend the rules." It can afford us the pleasure of watching old friends walk proudly into the sunset without having to endure the agony of their final steps.

As I see it, the death scene was inconsistent with Kirk's heritage. Perhaps more than any other *Star Trek* character, Kirk has had the capability and good fortune to find a way to "beat the odds" in the end—if not at present then in the future. Kirk also predicted in *THE FINAL FRONTIER* that when he did finally die, he would do it alone. Neither of these happened in *GENERATIONS*.

The death scene did dignify Kirk, even on a limited basis, to continue to "make a difference" in the unfolding *Star Trek* adventure. I know Paramount is creative enough to make this happen, but I'm not confident that they're willing to make the effort even though I believe William Shatner would entertain it.

I also suspect that the ramifications of keeping Kirk dead go well beyond one character. Kirk was the hub of the classic *Trek* "wheel," and without him there's probably less chance we fans will ever again enjoy new magic from any of the classic *Trek* cast. I hope I'm wrong, and that this letter encourages Paramount to find future opportunities to somehow showcase these fine performers in a rapidly growing *Star Trek* universe that's certainly big enough for everyone.

Charles Proudfit
Cincinnati, OH 45249

HERCULES EFFECTS

The following notes are related to the article on Renaissance Pictures' *HERCULES* [26:2:46]. With regards to the series, Visual Concept Engineering is no longer producing the effects. In August of [1994], I was hired by Rob Tapert of Renaissance Pictures to supervise and produce the visual effects sequences for the series.

Please note the following corrections: Don Waller was an animator on the "Gallimimus Sequence" in *JURASSIC PARK*, not

the "Kitchen Sequence" as mentioned in the article.

The transition I speak of is actually the move from hiring large visual effects houses to hiring accomplished artists who work out of their own studios, and in some cases, out of their own homes. This not only creates a more cost-efficient approach to effects work, but also allows the artist more control of their work, much in the same way Ray Harryhausen and other talented artists have approached things in the past.

The "sweat equity" I speak of is the extra effort someone puts into their work if they feel that they are receiving proper acknowledgement for their work. This acknowledgement is a natural by-product of the "non-facility" approach to the visual effects.

Kevin O'Neill
N. Hollywood, CA

WHY HOLLYWOOD WAS HEINLEIN-SHY

The article on Robert A. Heinlein [25:6/26:1:42] prompts me to add some observations. Heinlein was the co-author of the screenplay for *DESTINATION MOON* and, although not credited as technical advisor, was constantly on the sets performing that function. In his article "Shooting *DESTINATION MOON*" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, July, 1950), he states that the fact that the movie did not end up as the usual Hollywood comic book version of science fiction "can be attributed almost entirely to the integrity and good taste of Irving Pichel, the director." At one point, a script was brought in which included a dude ranch on the Moon with a girly trio singing, but "the calm insistence of Irving Pichel" got the picture back on track.

It seems a mystery that Hollywood virtually ignored Heinlein's works because they were full of adventure, memorable characters and, above all, ideas. Perhaps that last is the rub. *Sf* is a literature of ideas and when moviemakers decide to deal with ideas they seldom choose science fiction as their medium, even though it is unmatched as a vehicle for ideas.

There have been very, very few real *sf* movies made. What we usually get is either fantasy or horror of the most mindless sort. We get A. E. van Vogt's wonderful *BLACK DESTROYER* ripped-off

as *PREDATOR* or Don A. Stuart's chilling *WHO GOES THERE?* turned into a monster movie as *THE THING* (both versions), etc.

R. R. Anger
Toronto, Ontario CAN

STAR TREK WRITER CREDITS EXPLAINED

Just a note to express my appreciation for your three-star review of my *DEEP SPACE NINE* script, "Whispers" [25:6/26:1:105]. I always look forward to *Cinefantastique's* annual *STAR TREK* issue; the episode critiques and articles on the writing process are invaluable aids to freelancers preparing to go in and pitch.

If I may, I'd like to offer a comment for future consideration when you prepare these reviews. Obviously, you are very diligent in printing writer/director credits, and that's appreciated. Sometimes misspellings occur, and while regrettable, this is probably unavoidable. My complaint is that sometimes you incorrectly state the split "Teleplay by/Story by" credits. (This happened quite frequently in the past under Mark Altman, and thankfully I see less of it in the current issue, but let me explain...)

Credits are determined not by the production company of a given show, but by the Writers Guild. Credits are very important to writers, not just because of ego, but because residuals are tied directly to on-screen credits; a "Written by" guarantees 100% residuals; when split between teleplay and story, it's roughly a 60-40 split. (And split even further when "shared.")

"Written by" indicates that the story (in the form of a written outline) and the teleplay (script) were written by the same person (or team). Sometimes the writer is cut off at story and someone else does the script. Many writers, both staff and freelance, may work on the same episode; in the end the Guild arbitration committee reads all the various drafts, and determines who is most deserving of credit.

There is no such thing, as sometimes expressed in these *Cinefantastique* capsule reviews, as separate "Written by" and "Story by" credits on the same episode. (For instance, your review of "Rules of Acquisition" reads: *Written* by Ira Steven Behr, *Story* by Hilary Bader. It should read: *Teleplay* by James Crocker. *Story* by Dave Essoe. In fact, the on-screen

credit for that show reads: *Teleplay* by Frederick Rappaport, *Story* by Gabe Essoe & Kelley Miles.

Believe it or not, there is also a big difference between "and" and an "&." ("And" designates writers working separately, "&" denotes a writing team.)

Confusing? Definitely. The point is, the on-screen credits should be transposed exactly as they appear. The writers of these hard-fought-for credits will greatly appreciate it.

Paul Coyle
Los Angeles, CA 90046

CORRECTION:

In our article on Peter Jackson's *HEAVENLY CREATURES* [26:2:42], we incorrectly identified his current project as *JET BOUND GENIUS*. Make that *JACK BROWN GENIUS*, with apologies to both Jackson and our writer Alan Jones.

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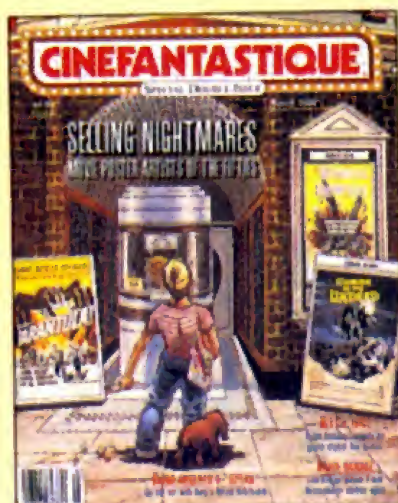


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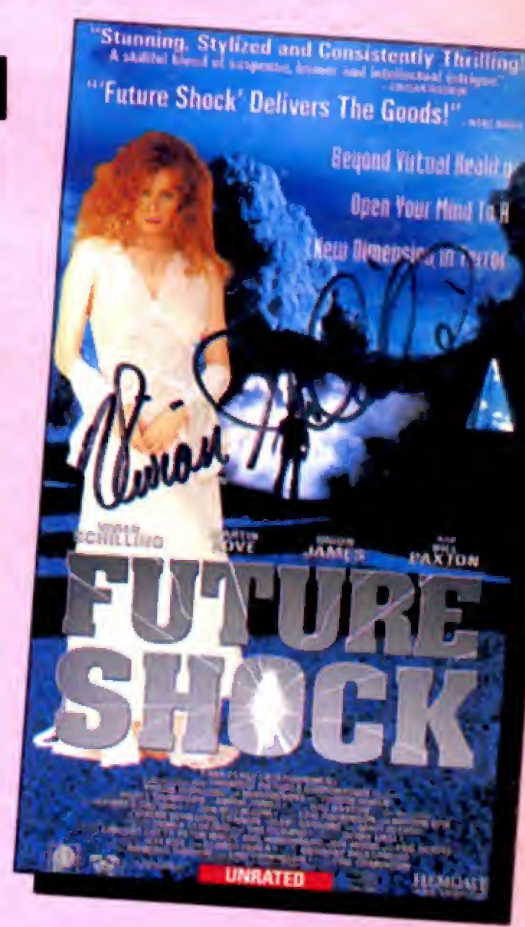
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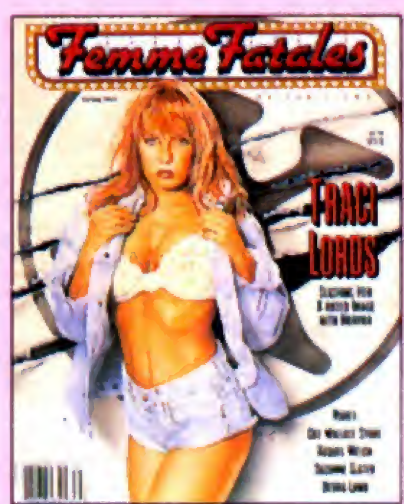
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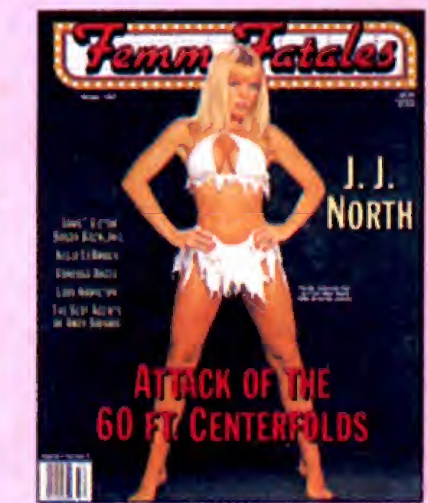
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